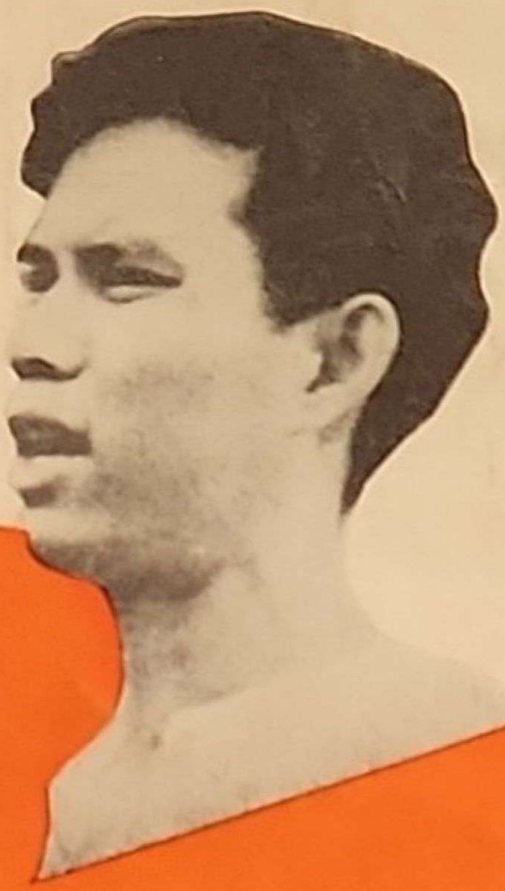


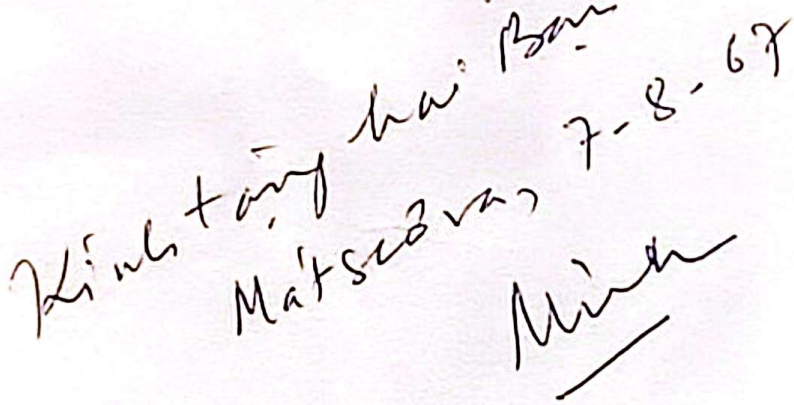
# THE WAY HE LIVED

*Liberation Publishing House*
*South Vietnam, October 1965*

# THE WAY HE LIVED

## THE STORY OF NGUYEN VAN TROI

Told by his widow Phan Thi Quyen
Written by Tran Dinh Van



Stronger than death, Nguyen Van Troi shouts before his execution: "Long live Vietnam! Long live Ho Chi Minh!"

## *EDITOR'S NOTE*

"There are deaths which make one immortal," wrote Poet To Huu in connection with the death of Nguyen Van Troi. Nothing is more true. Never will the picture of the young Saigon electrician who had made his executioners tremble on the day of his death fade from the memory of men.

Millions upon millions of Nguyen Van Troi have taken his place in South Vietnam in our people's battle to the finish against U.S. imperialist aggression. The memory of Nguyen Van Troi strengthens the arms of our youth, increases their determination and inspires them with strength beyond measure. This is true on the battlefield, in the factories and in the rice fields.

In death Nguyen Van Troi is immortal. We think of him as we go to work or to battle. His example will live always, in other countries as well as in Vietnam.

Nguyen Van Troi was prepared to pay the price of death for the sake of life. He has joined the other martyrs for liberty, those who lay down their lives for Man's dignity and the happiness of their people. Troi has taken his place in the ranks of the immortals.

In this volume, his young widow, Phan Thi Quyen, tells of the life and death of this hero.

LIBERATION Publishing House

Phan Thi Quyen at a congress in liberated zone (at her right Nguyen Huu Tho, President of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation)

*IN those days, Sister Quyen hardly had a moment's rest. When the news spread that Nguyen Van Troi's wife had come to attend the Congress of South Vietnamese Women, delegates from all the zones and provinces called to ask about her. A woman guerrilla from the West Zone came running to the quarters of the Saigon delegation and said in a voice filled with emotion: "For a whole month, the people of my district fought to avenge Brother Troi. I was wounded in that campaign. We would like Sister Quyen to spend a day with our delegation and tell us about her husband. It will inspire us when we go home to kill more of the enemy."*

*A mother from the Fifth Zone told Quyen affectionately: "Troi came from Quang Nam; so you are a daughter-in-law of the people of the Fifth Zone. We would like you to come and live with us."*

*Sister Quyen did not stay in any one place after that: she spent time first with one delegation then another.*

*It was no longer possible for me to have talks with her lasting a whole morning or afternoon — as in the days immediately following her escape from Saigon — to record the story of her husband's fine and noble life. She promised to meet me every evening after each sitting of the Congress, to tell me about her last days with Troi and the last few times she saw him in prison and in the condemned cell.*

That Sunday morning May 10, 1964, I was anxious. Troi had been away from home all night. I was longing for him, more than any previous Sunday. Since our wedding, we had not been able to visit any of our relatives. My parents were from the North. Along with many other villagers from Van Giap commune, Thuong Tin district, Ha Dong province, they had moved South several decades earlier. Yet all of them

have continued to observe the customs and traditions of their native place. One of these traditions was that newly weds should visit the bride's family the day after the wedding. Weeks had gone by since ours. But Troi always found some excuse not to go. Would he be busy again this Sunday?

I was really worried. What was so important that prevented him from having even a single day off? We were very much in love and before our marriage, whenever he spoke of our coming wedding, he had always shown the greatest joy, calling it the happiest day in his life. "There is only one such day in a man's life," he would say, "so let's make it a great day, with lots of people attending. Then, we'll have a few days to ourselves, for trips and visits." But when our wedding-day came, he didn't live up to his word. He hadn't even had the haircut he needed. After we were married, he usually came back from work late. He sat up late at night, making all kinds of sketches. When he took me to a friend's, I would be left to sit by myself while the two of them talked endlessly in the courtyard, sometimes moving little stones around the way chess players move their pawns. Once I asked him: "You seem to have a lot of problems." He answered: "The boss has asked me to repair a complicated electrical machine and I haven't found the way to go about it yet." The wedding-ring disappeared from his finger, a ring with the letter "Q" I had given him on Lunar New Year's Day of 1964. He said it interfered with his work. I was amazed. When I gave it to him, he had seemed deeply moved, as if he had received something sacred. He fondled it and tried it on, to make sure it would not slip off during work. Turning it on his finger, he said half in jest: "It will leave my hand only if this finger is cut off in an accident at work."

Before we were married he seemed madly in love with me. We had been introduced by one of his girl cousins who

worked in the same factory as I did. Every afternoon when I left work I would find him waiting for me, rain or shine. Once he went back to his village in Quang Nam for two weeks. During that time, he wrote me two long letters, in which he made me feel as if we had been separated for years. I loved to read his letters, I knew every line by heart. I was secretly proud to have such a sweetheart, so faithful, so deeply in love, and so respected by my family. Other young men had courted me, but he was completely different from them. He didn't flatter me: his love was deep and sincere, but at the same time was dignified and frank. He wouldn't overlook even a little fault, or words which he thought inconsiderate. Sometimes I would get angry, and then he would say: "I only want to make you a still finer girl. The more we love each other, the more we should try to make each other better people."

But now, it was so hard to understand why he was acting as he did! He had become too silent. I tried patiently to account for this sudden change in his manner. I must say however that in our daily life he continued to shower me with attention, even more than before. Once I was ill and had to stay away from work for half a day. He was beside himself with worry, rushing around for medicine as if I had become seriously ill. He played the mandolin for me, fed me rice soup and fruit and cared for me tenderly. He sat up late at night fanning me to sleep. Only the day before he had taken the trouble before going out to prepare my bath. He had filled a pail of water and carried it to the house next door, for we had no bathroom of our own and used our neighbour's. But seeing him getting ready to go out on Saturday evening, I was irritated and told him huffily:

"Go out if you have to. I can carry the water myself."

"No, there are a few steep steps. You might fall."

When he reached the door, with a hand on his motor bike, he turned and said:

"I'll soon be through repairing the machine. Tomorrow I may be able to take you out for a walk. Just say where you'd like to go. If you want, we'll go away for a day or two."

So I was confident that this Sunday he would come back and that I would be able to go out with him. I got out a gown, the one I had worn for our wedding, and began to plan which of our relatives we should visit first. And I would take Troi to see a few of my friends; they had been teasing me, saying: "Your husband is as timid as a mouse. Doesn't dare show his face anywhere!"

Around nine in the morning, seven or eight policemen suddenly walked in, dragging a man with his arms tied behind his back in handcuffs. I didn't recognize Troi at first. But as soon as he saw me, he cried out: "Quyen, I've been arrested!" He came up to me as I stood there, dumbfounded. He had been gone only one night, but he looked completely different. His clothes were stained with mud and blood, so that they no longer looked blue. His face was drawn and bruised, his hair tousled. The policemen brutally pushed him in and made him sit on the bed. One of them, probably the commander, looked around our little room and speaking with a Northern accent said:

"Cosy and snug. Nice for newly-weds. Yet he had to go and stir up trouble!"

He pointed at a few things, adding:

"A mandolin, new clothes!"

He kept glancing here and there. When he noticed me, he asked Troi:

"A young wife too, you should be so happy. What more do you want?"

Tossing his head back to get a lock of hair out of his eyes, Troi answered:

"I told you over and over last night. What more I want is to wipe out all the Yankees. I want the South to be free."

The police commander stood leaning against a small table, facing Troi. He glared at him and said threateningly:

"We'll see if you can go on brazening it out."

He shouted to other policemen in the courtyard, who were searching for explosives, and told them to make a thorough search. Then he stepped towards the bed, saying:

"Brand-new bedding, blankets and pillows! Soft and snug. But you weren't satisfied to stay home and enjoy these comforts. Instead you let yourself be tricked by Viet Cong into committing a crime. Of course, the Viet Cong have disappeared, God knows where; but you, we've got you handcuffed and soon you'll get more blows."

Looking him in the eye Troi answered right back:

"I'm not like you. I can't bow my head and try to live comfortably when the Yankees bring in bombs and guns to kill my people."

He sat with his back against the head of the bed, completely calm, ignoring the policemen standing around him. He looked around at the little room he had built two years ago with the help of his nephew, collecting board after board, palm-leaf after palm-leaf. He looked at me for a long, long moment. His eyes were filled with love and affection, and it seemed he wanted to say something to me and to console me. The more aware I became of his deep love, the more I was filled with remorse. I blamed myself for not having been able to understand him because I was so young and inexperienced and for having doubted his faithfulness. Everything now was quite clear: it was for the sake of the revolution that he had given up his personal happiness, that he had even been ready

to defer his marriage. I now understood why he had wanted to postpone our wedding. At that time I had suspected him of intending to desert me. I had sent out the invitations. What would people think if the wedding were postponed? Unable to persuade me when I objected, he had sat still for a long moment, and then said:

"How can I make you understand? All right, let's go ahead with the wedding as planned. But please, don't think badly of me. I never had the idea of deserting you. I love you so much. Now you are angry with me, but some day you will understand."

At last I understood him, now he had been arrested. Sitting in a corner of the room, I wept bitterly.

Policemen equipped with mine-detectors conducted a long search of house and the courtyard, but failed to find any explosives. They then crowded into the room and stood around Troi. Their commander asked me:

"Do you know whether your husband has hidden any explosives anywhere? Have you ever seen him trying to hide anything in the house?"

I began to cry and answered:

"I don't know anything about what my husband has been doing. I never saw him try to hide anything."

"If you don't speak out, I'll beat your husband to death in this very room."

"I can't tell what I don't know."

He turned to Troi:

"If you tell us where you've hidden the explosives, this room will continue to be a love nest for you two. If you keep refusing, it will be turned into torture chamber, and you'll die in it."

"I don't know where the explosives are."

They rushed at him and beat him up, then gave him electrical shocks. The shocks were so violent that he was tossed writhing on the bed. I could not sit still any longer: all fear had left my heart; I rushed at the thugs and tried to stop them. One of them caught hold of me, pulled me back to the chair, pressed my shoulders down to make me sit and stood in front of me. I started screaming. They pulled out their guns and pointed them at me.

Then they stopped their torturing and asked Troi:

"Where are the explosives?"

Panting heavily, he said, louder than before: "I've told you I don't know. If you still want to know, then wherever the Yankees are, the explosives are there."

This time, the police commander himself started the beating. Snatching a stick from one of the thugs, he lashed out at Troi, raining blows all over his body. After each beating, they questioned him. An hour passed without their getting a word out of him. The commander ordered his men to take Troi away. Rising to his feet with an effort, he told me in a loud voice: "Don't worry, Quyen, just you and our nephew here try to make ends meet."

His clothes had been torn, not a single button was left, his chest and his face were bleeding. He slowly made for the door, still looking at me and forcing himself to smile. I struggled with the policeman guarding me, trying to get closer to my husband. In spite of the thug's hold on my neck, I managed to cry out: "Troi, I love you so much! I love you!"

The commander turned and said:

"Forget about love and pity. Look for another husband. The man deserves to die for his crime."

That night, at about eleven, the policemen came back. They told me:

"Your husband wants to see you. Right now."

Hearing that I might see him, I hastily followed them to their car. If I knew where they were keeping him, I would be able to look after him and bring him food. After a while, they drove into a lane, arrested a school-girl, then brought both of us to the City Police Headquarters. In the interrogation room, I learned that the girl was also suspected of being connected with Troi's activities. That same night, I was interrogated. A police superintendent asked me:

"Do you know anything about your husband's activities?"

"Nothing."

"How long have you been married?"

"Nineteen days, exactly."

"Do you realize that for newly-weds like you and Troi, these are the finest, happiest days of your lives?"

"Indeed I do."

"Good. If you tell everything, and hide nothing, these finest, happiest days of your lives will not end."

He paused, yawned and leaned back in his armchair. He was a rat-faced man, with the complexion of an opium-eater. He continued:

"Whom did Troi call on most often?"

"He worked all day, sometimes even in the evening. He hardly ever went out. Once in a while he would take a stroll in the streets. I don't know whom he visited most often."

"Did anyone come to visit him often?"

"Only once in a while. They would play music together or sing, or do repair work given them on a piece-work basis. I've been married to him for just a few weeks, I can't know much about his friends."

"Try to remember. Tell me everything you know. Think it over. If you don't hide anything, he'll be released. I've

met Troi, and now I've met you. To tell the truth, you're a nice couple. I really feel sorry for you."

On the desk he tossed a photograph of Troi and me, the one taken on our wedding day. In the photo, I was wearing a blue-flowered gown and held a bouquet of gladioli, Troi stood beside me. The police superintendent tried hard to put a note of pity in his voice:

"Really, it would wring anyone's heart to think that such a young couple may soon be separated forever. I've been on this job for a long time and I've saved the happiness of many a family. You can trust me. You and Troi will certainly be together again if you help us discover Troi's leaders and associates, and where the explosives are hidden. . . ."

I said:

"I don't know anything about his affairs. I have my hands full with my job at the factory and the household. Just visit the Bach Tuyet cotton wool packing-factory where I work and you'll understand what I mean. I have to work even on Sundays, and on weekdays I am on the job twelve hours at a stretch."

The police superintendent kept interrogating me and the school-girl, trying to find out Troi's connexions. Towards midnight, he took us to visit the torture chamber, where he made us look closely at the instruments of torture: ropes hanging from the ceiling, to which prisoners would be tied, canvas sacks into which their corpses would be thrown, soap powder to be mixed with water and forced down their throats, pins of various kinds that would be driven under their finger-nails, a tank for the water torture, etc.

He said in a threatening tone:

"These are for you if you try to fool us."

At about two in the morning, we were taken back to the interrogation room. I was on tenterhooks. As we passed each

room, I tried to peep in, but nowhere could I find a trace of Troi. I asked the police superintendent:

"You said that my husband wanted to see me. Where is he?"

He answered:

"He was here at noon yesterday for questioning. We wanted to explain to him the government's 'rallying' policy and make him repent his crime, desert the Viet Cong, and cross over to the government side. If he had agreed, you two would have been reunited at once. But we had scarcely said one word when he threw himself out of the window and broke his leg. He's now in Cho Ray hospital."

I burst out crying:

"You beat him up and broke his leg and now you're trying to make people believe that he jumped out of a window. . . ."

He broke in:

"Don't raise such fuss in the middle of the night. I've told you the truth. You'll know for yourself soon enough. Nobody has tried to hide anything from you."

"If my husband has been taken to hospital, you must let me go home."

"I'll tell you when you can go."

Only then did I realize I had in fact been arrested. So, I was kept at Police Headquarters, and wasn't even allowed to go home and fetch my clothes and bedding. Every day they forced me to attend interrogation sessions in which people suspected of being connected with the attempt on McNamara's life were questioned and beaten up.

The most brutally treated was Loi, who had been arrested along with Troi. On the evening of the day Troi made an unsuccessful attempt to escape, Loi had succeeded in breaking his handcuffs and climbing over the prison wall. But he had been caught again. Now I was seeing him for the first time.

Loi was only about eighteen, and he and Troi came from the same village. When Loi had first been taken into custody, his fellow-prisoners didn't like his looks: his hair was permed and fell in great waves over his face and low on his neck; this made him look like a street hooligan. But they came to know him better: he worked in a barber shop and his extravagant haircut, done on orders of the boss, was a publicity stunt. When they knew that he had taken part in the McNamara affair, they took a real liking to him and looked after him.

In the interrogation room, Loi was savagely beaten with sticks. I kept crying, out of pity for Loi, and because I knew that the treatment inflicted on Troi must have been much worse. They beat Loi unmercifully but he never spoke. When he fainted they flung him into a corner of the room. Later, I was to meet Loi for a few minutes when we were both out to fetch our meals. He hastily told me: "Troi has told them that he did everything on his own initiative and had been in touch with nobody. He kept repeating this in spite of all the beatings. He is really a brave man. I was there when he jumped out of the window. I was sitting right next to him. I saw him glancing first at the policemen and then at the window. Then all of a sudden, his hands still in handcuffs, he threw himself out of the window to the street. If he hadn't landed on a passing motor car, he would have escaped. . . ."

Their second victim was Hua, Troi's nephew. Hua was only seventeen and worked in the same workshop as Troi: Ngoc Anh, in Phat Diem street, a firm specializing in the repair of electrical motors and household electrical appliances. This was the pretext used by the police: since both uncle and nephew worked in the same place, the nephew must have helped his uncle or at least have had some idea of his activities.

I don't know how many times they had already beaten Hua. But he kept repeating: "I only know that my uncle did the work the boss gave him. I don't know anything else."

Three days later, the police superintendent took me to see Troi. As the car went along, he pointed to the streets and said:

"Look at what a fool your Troi is! People go to work quietly and enjoy themselves. But he had to listen to the Viet Cong and now he's locked up in one place and his wife in another."

He said many more things, but the noise of the engine drowned out his words, and I only heard snatches of his remarks. At the gate of the Cho Ray hospital I hurriedly bought some fruit for my husband.

Troi was locked up in a room with six other people. The room was shut off from the outside world by metal netting, and the window-panes were all frosted. A group of policemen stood guard in a nearby room.

When he saw me come into the room, Troi tried to sit up, but he was too weak and fell back on the bed, supporting himself on an arm. He asked at once:

"Have all those arrested been released? Have they been released?"

I sat on the bed beside him. Although people dear to him were still under arrest and being tortured, I tried to reassure him by saying:

"They've all been released. Don't worry. I'm the only one left."

He was wearing just a pair of shorts, and his chest was covered with purple weals raised by blows from the sticks and bruises from punches. His right leg was in plaster from hip to ankle. He was terribly thin, his eyes were sunken, his

chin stuck out, and his face, his forehead in particular, was covered with cuts and bruises. Looking at him I could not keep the tears back. I asked him:

"Are you in much pain?"

"Not much. I can sleep. Did they beat you up?"

"No."

"Honest?"

"Just look at me. But they asked a lot of questions."

He seized my hands, and looked at me with love and pity. I told him in a choked voice:

"Forgive me. That evening when you went out, I was rude to you and angry. Forgive me and forget it!"

He smiled, his face wrinkling and said:

"No, it was my fault, it was all my fault. I'm not angry with you. I love you, I love you so much."

The police superintendent interrupted:

"Wait until you're back in your own home to talk about such thing. I am here to help bring you together."

He turned to Troi:

"Why did you throw yourself out of the window? I only wanted to explain to you the government policy; once you understand the government policy and desert the Viet Cong, you'll be allowed to go back to your family. Doesn't it make you happy to think about it? But I had not even begun when you. . . ."

Troi broke in, saying:

"Don't waste your breath trying to explain the 'rallying policy' to me."

The police superintendent managed to keep calm and went on in a honeyed tone:

"I know you're not the main culprit in this affair. It's someone else."

Troi shook his head:

"There is no culprit. It's not a crime but a service to the country to kill American aggressors. Just me, nobody else, planned to do away with McNamara."

The policeman patiently tried to win him over:

"Think it over. Don't you know you've committed a very serious crime? An attempt on the life of a top-ranking American."

"It is because I knew he was an American imperialist bigwig that I wanted to get him, even it cost me my life."

The policemen standing around his bed exchanged furious looks. They were itching to get their hands on him, but the superintendent's voice was as calm as ever:

"Think of your beautiful young wife. Pity her. You married her only a few days ago. Don't ruin her whole life."

"All these days since I was arrested, you've kept harping on that, talking and talking about how we just get married. You thrust our wedding photograph under my nose and made long speeches about love and happiness in the hope that the image of my wife would overshadow that of my country. Let me tell you you're wasting your time. As long as the Yankees are here, no one can have happiness."

The police superintendent just ignored the firm way Troi rebuffed him. He said:

"Yesterday, to help you pass the time, I brought a tape-recording of the story told by a student of the North who recently crossed the 17th parallel to escape to the South. It's not often that you see or hear someone who has crossed over from behind the communist iron curtain to tell you of his experience. But you refused to understand the leniency and solicitude of the government, and even dared to smash the recorder. You've overstepped all limits. No humanitarian policy can be applied to you."

"If that filthy scum had been here, I wouldn't have stopped at breaking the recorder. I would have broken his skull as well. Not only did he slander the North, he dared to slander President Ho Chi Minh. What impudence!"

He was speaking loudly, emphasizing each word. He lay on his bed breathing heavily, his face angry, and he looked as though he intended to say much more.

The police superintendent managed to keep cool. He said: "I'll come back another day." Then he told me:

"You're leaving too. Time's up."

I hastily peeled an orange for my husband, made him eat part of it and put the rest in his hand. Bending over him, I whispered in his ear: "I'll follow you wherever you go. Any time they move you somewhere else, let the family know."

Then they transferred me to another prison, one under the General Police Department. I was locked up in a cell with ten other women, two of them my age: A., a school-girl who had been arrested while putting up an anti-American placard, and Y., a girl who worked for a trading firm. The latter had been savagely tortured, for at her place of work they had found N.F.L. banners and documents. This morning, she walked with difficulty on her way back from interrogation, groping her way along the wall. They had driven pins under her finger-nails and blood was still dripping. As soon as she got inside the cell, she buried her face in the shoulder of one of her friends, and cried bitterly. Refusing to be comforted, she said, sobbing:

"Oh let me cry, do. I can only cry here, among friends. I never cry in front of them, but only show them how I despise them."

Two days after my arrival, I still hadn't made any friends. The other prisoners looked at me with cold, suspicious eyes.

That evening, after eating, a song rose in the cell. After one of the women sang a line — the others took it up in chorus, softly. Y. also sang. With her tortured body and face, I had thought only moans, certainly not songs, would come from her lips. She sat leaning against the iron bars, facing us, and sang with passion. Her hands wrapped in rags moved up and down beating time. After a while, seeing my eyes still red with crying, she told me:

"Choral singing is nice. Why do you look so sad? Stop crying and join in."

The girls took turns in keeping watch. Whenever the guards came along, everyone would stop singing and pretend to be chatting. The song was a rather long one and had been composed by a musician from the North. It was called *The Song of Hope.*

I no longer dared to cry. In the optimist atmosphere in the cell I felt that my attitude was quite out of place. I was particularly embarrassed when I saw Y. trying to memorize the song. She was brimming over with a love of life. I felt confidence in her, and answered every question she asked.

The following morning, we resumed our talk. I told her what had happened to me. When I mentioned the name of my husband she seemed very surprised and asked quickly:

"Nguyen Van Troi, did you say? So you're the wife of the man who almost killed McNamara?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that he threw himself out of the window and broke his leg?"

"Yes, I saw him in hospital."

"Good heavens!" she cried, and looked at me with deep sympathy, her swollen hands stroking my shoulders. She said:

"McNamara escaped by a hair's breadth last year when he inspected the West Zone; his escort plane was hit. He had

another narrow escape this time. Although Troi failed to kill him, that Yankee must be shaking in his boots. Someone just taken into custody here told us that the police found the mine and carried out a thorough search for explosives around Cong Ly* Bridge, but had not dared use the bridge. A helicopter took McNamara from Tan Son Nhut airport to the grounds of the Republican Hospital. From there he went to the American Embassy by a roundabout way. Because of Troi's action, he had to scurry like a rat."

Presently the news spread in all the cell-blocks that "Troi's wife is in Cell 4." From the cells facing ours, a voice came ringing across:

"Sister Troi is there, isn't she? Is she the one with the light blue blouse?"

I answered:

"Yes, I am."

"Are you all right? Did they beat you?"

The voice sounded like that of an older woman. I answered:

"They haven't so far. They only questioned me and tried to threaten me."

"We in prison have heard many things about Troi. People who know him who were taken into custody and even members of the police have spoken of how staunch he is. Even though they had tens of thousands of troops standing guard, Troi managed to plant a mine and the pirate bigwig only escaped by the skin of his teeth. . . . How old are you, my child?"

"Twenty."

"Do you need anything?"

As I hesitated, not knowing what to say, another prisoner said: "She came here empty-handed. She wasn't allowed to bring anything with her."

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* *Cong Ly*: Justice.

At noon, the cell-doors were opened for the prisoners to go and take their meals. Many took the opportunity to bring me clothing, a blanket, mosquito-netting, tooth-brush, fruit and other things. Several women argued over which would have the privilege of taking me to the dining hall, where they insisted on sharing their food with me. Heartened by their sympathy, I felt as though I was visiting relatives after a long absence. Sister X. who was sitting next to me, whispered in my ear:

"If you need something, or are worried, just tell us. We'll defend you and help you. Our only wish is that you keep well and make progress, so that Troi can be easy in his mind."

She said she had met Troi recently. I hastily asked her:

"Where did you meet him? How did he look?"

Swallowing her rice, she said slowly:

"After he had jumped out of the window and broken his leg, they beat him up and only that evening did they take him to the prisoner's ward in Cho Ray hospital. We women prisoners in hospital saw policemen carrying in a man covered up to his face with a blanket. They lay him just outside our door. The man was quite young, not much more than twenty. We managed to worm this much information out of his guard who said: 'He is the one who tried to kill Mr. McNamara.' There and then, we rushed out to take care of him, but the police beat us back. Finally they allowed one of us out. Our representative tried to speak to the young man, but he was unconscious, his eyes closed as if he were asleep breathing evenly. His escort waited for the guard to finish his meal and come with the key, and then they locked him up in a cell. At nine that night, however, the police came again with a van and moved him somewhere else. We pumped a guard at the gate for the reason. He said, shaking his head: 'This Viet Cong is a terror. He jumped out of the window at noon

in an attempt to escape, but broke his leg, and was brought here. You'd think he'd be willing to stay quiet for a while, but when we looked through the cell window late this evening, what did we see? He was taking off his bandages and getting ready to make another attempt to escape! Now he has to be moved to where a tighter guard can be kept over him. If he had managed to escape, we'd all have been flung into jail.'

"Two days later, we ran into some of his police guards again. They told us some stories about him. At midnight of the night he was taken from Cho Ray, the thugs came to check on his new prison; they were all dismayed to hear about his second attempt to escape in one day. With a broken leg, handcuffed, bruised and battered, Troi still kept himself proud. Every insult the thugs hurled at him, he rebuffed. He gave them a tongue-lashing. The thugs accused him of being an agent of the Communists, after trying to smear Communism with every kind of slander, they charged him with being a Communist-inspired saboteur and terrorist. To this Troi replied that he had never seen the Communists do harm to anybody, but on the contrary since he had been a boy he had seen Yankees pouring in in ever greater numbers, that the skies over Saigon echoed with the roar of their planes, and that they had been killing the people with their bombs and bullets. Then he added sarcastically: 'If you rascals keep calling me an agent of the Communists, I'll look on it as an honour. The Communists have been working for the good of the people. Only the toadies of the Americans have reason to feel ashamed of themselves.' That night, the thugs ordered the police to keep a close watch lest he try to escape again. Since they stayed at his side, the policemen heard Troi talk about the political situation and explain it to them. One of them, in particular, held Troi in high respect. He told us that when Troi talked to him his voice was gentle, and not harsh as in his argument with the

thugs, when he had given them tit for tat. The policeman also said he had brought water for Troi to drink, and a wet towel for him to wipe himself."

The women prisoners were allowed to go and sit in the sun, in the prison courtyard today. For us young people, sitting in the sun or being detailed for fatigue duties were good occasions to hear Sister X. or other prisoners tell stories about the struggles waged in enemy prisons. Sister X. had been in many prisons; she spent years in solitary confinement in underground dungeons. Her husband was sentenced to death, and probably had been executed. Yet, among us prisoners, she was the source of joy and optimism. Often she would sit reciting softly to us the poem *Brother Dong*, also known in our prison as the *Poem on Communist Mettle.* She talked to us about the revolutionary activities of Brother Dong and about his heroic death in Gia Dinh prison. She praised Dong's wife, who had to take care of her many children, yet had stood fast at her husband's side, fighting to the end in her cell to defend the revolution. I particularly liked to hear stories about wives standing loyally by their husbands, sharing bitter and sweet. But at the same time these stories made me ashamed of myself, for not only had I not given the least help to my husband in his revolutionary work, but I often made a nuisance of myself. Poor Troi! Every time he came home late, he took care to drop at my parents' to pick up my youngest sister and bring her along with him, so that I might not suspect him of fickleness. Such incidents crowded before my mind's eye and stung my heart like so many needles. I thought of how, before and after our marriage, Troi had to concentrate his energy and mind on his difficult and dangerous task, and at the same time had to give attention to keeping my heart at peace.

Seeing tears well up in my eyes, Sister X. said:

"Try to control yourself. If you cry, they'll grow suspicious and drive us in."

I told her:

"Other people get help from their husband or wife in their revolutionary activities. As for me, not only did I not give Troi the least help, but I have often stood in his way, I regret for not having won his confidence."

"In revolutionary work, each person must carry out his task," Sister X. explained. "He must not talk about it to other people unless the task required it. This is an absolute rule, and everyone is expected to obey it. How could Troi have loved you if he didn't trust you? Now, did you two often talk things over?"

"He often found fault with me."

"What for?"

I thought about it for a while, then said:

"He would be critical if I was thoughtless towards our neighbours. He didn't like gaudy clothes. He said: 'We are working people and should not imitate showy styles of dress.' My clothes are either marine blue or white. He loved those colours. He refused to go to the cinema, saying: 'We'll see as many films as we like when Saigon has become as wholesome as Hanoi.' During the two years we've known each other, we went to the cinema just once."

Sister X. asked:

"Now you know how Troi hates the Yankees. Did he ever talk about these feelings to you?"

"Oh yes, quite often. He told me that his native region had witnessed the first 'Denounce Communists' campaigns launched by the U.S.-Diem clique in 1954. He said he had seen people strung together through their hands with wire at Cho Duoc and Vinh Trinh and taken away to no one knows where. None of them ever came back. His sister once told him: 'It's good

you're still just a lad. Otherwise you would have had the same fate.' Soon after we fell in love, he paid a visit to his home in Quang Nam and then went up to Hue. He got there just when the Buddhists were being suppressed for the first time. Back in Saigon, he was still seething with anger when we met. He told me that with his own eyes he had seen people being crushed under the caterpillar treads of tanks and the bodies of others blown to bits by shells. He said the Yankees are even more savage than the French, many times more so. Later, whenever he recalled these events, he would say: 'Using cannon to put down popular demonstrations! South Vietnam is probably the only place in the world where such a barbarity happens!' I've known for long that he hates the American aggressors. He's never even called them Americans. If while we were out walking we encountered an American convoy, he would hold me back, saying: 'Let those filthy swine pass first.' That was what he called the American aggressors. But I didn't see any sign of his anti-American activities until quite recently. From the stories he told me and the way he acted I suspected that he had joined some anti-American organization. Soon after our marriage, he came home one day looking elated. 'Very special news today! Have you heard it?' he asked. As I showed complete surprise, he continued: 'Our people sank a 15,000-ton aircraft carrier with scores of planes on it. A tremendous feat! If only I could do something like that!' A few days later he didn't come home for lunch. That was May 6th. With other workers he had gone to the funeral of a taxi-driver who had been shot dead by the Yankees. When he came back, he told me that the funeral had become an open anti-American demonstration with the slogan: 'Down with the American aggressors and murderers!' An anti-America week was to be held, from May 15 to 22, during which taxi-cabs would refuse to serve Americans, who were also going to be boycotted by people in

other trades, including newsboys and shoeshine boys. He was looking forward to that week of anti-American struggle, but on May 9 he was arrested."

Sister X. shook her head:

"Quyen dear, you're really a very simple girl. You didn't realize that Troi trusted you, and was guiding you in revolutionary work. In an enemy-occupied city like Saigon, without the people's love and protection, one would soon fall into the hands of secret agents. Troi's criticism was aimed at guiding you to become an upright young woman, who could clearly distinguish right from wrong. What he told you was meant to make you aware gradually of who has been causing so much suffering in the South, and make you hate them so that you would want to join the revolution. When I hear you, my respect for your husband grows. A young man just over twenty living in vice-ridden city as Saigon, so full of temptations of all kinds. Yet, he went to the films only once in two years — and probably only because he wanted to please his sweetheart!"

I felt a bit embarrassed, for she had put her finger on it. I said: "The film we saw was about Buddha's life. I didn't understand a thing. When he came back, I asked him about it and he said he'd forgotten the show completely."

The other prisoners burst out laughing. Some had to cover their mouths with their hands to smother their laughter. Sister X. asked me: "Did he ever tell you about his life?"

We moved to a sunny spot at the far end of the compound. Noticing that my companions had all been listening intently, I went on with my story:

"I have never visited his native region. He promised that we would go there some time. He said that after our marriage, he would ask for a few days off and take me there. He said Quang Nam is a poor region, with very few rice fields and that the people have to wander all over looking for work. The

only plentiful thing is water, not like here in Saigon where the people have to wrangle at the public fountains for every can of water. He told me how beautiful the Thu Bon river is. It's only about a hundred metres from his home. The water runs clear, and the sandy banks are shaded with groves of bamboo. When we would see people from Saigon flocking to the seaside resorts at Vung Tau on holidays, he used to console me by saying: 'When we visit my own region, you'll find the sandy stretches along the river bank just as nice as the beaches on the sea-shore. We'll have plenty of time to bask in the sun.' He had had a sad childhood, his mother having died when he was just a small child. He was three when the French launched a raid in the region to hunt down revolutionaries. His mother took him along when she hid out in the jungle, but she died a few months later of hunger and exposure. His father was captured by the French. When he got out of jail he went to work far away and only came home once every few years. Troi was brought up by an uncle, and by his elder brother and sister-in-law.

"Once before we were married, we quarrelled. It made him very sad. He told me: 'I lost my mother when I was little. I only saw my father once in several years, and then only for a few days. I yearn for a family life. Now I have a sweetheart and she makes me unhappy by being angry with me. Your family moved here from the North I had to leave my native Quang Nam to try to make living here; both of us have the same problems. Now that we've met, we should love and be kind to each other.'

"When he was 15, Troi had come to Da Nang to stay with his elder brother in the hope of finding some way to support himself. After he felt he could not depend on his brother and sister-in-law, who were very poor, he decided to go to Saigon. He went to the wharf and got on a ship bound for that city.

He had written a letter to his brother and his family and asked a friend to take it to them. But the friend took the letter to Troi's brother before the ship left. So, while standing on deck, Troi saw his brother rushing to the wharf on his bike. He went below and hid in the ship's hold. His brother paced the wharf, shouting: 'Troi, come home! We'll manage together. Your sister-in-law and I will look after you. Don't go away, you'll die so far away, brother!' In his hiding place, Troi cried bitterly. He loved his brother so much, but could not bear to be a burden on him, a man with wife and several children. His brother's voice rose from the wharf, 'Troi, come home with us, we'll share whatever there is to eat... brother!' until the ship sailed out. Troi has often told me about those desperate cries that had moved him so deeply.

"Before he had time to learn a trade and being unable to find his father, Troi tried to make a living as a pedicab driver. But he wasn't yet familiar with the city, so he often took his customers the long way round, which made them grumble and cut the fare due to him. It sometimes happened that he had to ask his way and when the customer was in a bad mood, he would curse Troi and leave the pedicab for another without paying him a cent. He often went without food, and this period of his life was full of hardships. As he said, one might think that old people, who could not work hard enough, would be unable to make a living, but he was young and strong and toiled from dawn to dusk, but he never had enough to eat. All around him he saw some people so rich they didn't know what to do with their money. Take the owner of the pedicabs for instance: the only work he and his family did was to collect fees from the poor people to whom they rented the vehicles; but they had plenty to eat and to wear and felt they had the right to shout at and insult the pedicab drivers.

"Some time later, a distant uncle found a job for him as an electrician's apprentice. After working for two firms that paid him starvation wages, he moved to Ngoc Anh where he worked until his arrest."

The time for sitting in the sun had run out. The warders shouted at us to go back to our cells. Later, whenever there was the chance, the other prisoners would ask me to tell them more about Troi. As I was rather shy to talk about him, Sister X. once told me:

"We who have been thrown into prison and who have to endure constant ill-treatment draw courage from the examples of the lives and struggles of particularly good comrades. This gives us fresh strength to face every test, and deeper hatred for the enemy. I would like to hear more about Troi and to follow his heroic deeds. A poem was written about Brother Dong. The jails must have one about Brother Troi."

One day I was called to meet some policemen who asked me:

"Want to go see your husband?"

I answered in a flash:

"Any time."

They said:

"There is one condition: urge him to confess!"

I kept silent. Sister X. had told me several times about the police trick of using a "soft" wife to influence her husband. They were now trying the trick on me. They took me out so quickly that I had no time to buy any food for Troi.

I had been hoping that he would have recovered some of his strength after a period of rest. But when I saw him, he was in the same state as the first visit: he was pale and drawn, his hair was so long it covered his ears, there was an uneven stubble on his chin, and he was dreadfully dirty. Grasping my sleeve with his thin blue-veined hand, he made me sit down, saying:

"I am fine, I am quite all right."

His chest was bare. His body was wrapped in a cloth wet with sweat. His uncombed hair fell over his face. I brushed it back with my fingers and asked him:

"Do you feel any better?"

Before he could answer, a policeman tried to make me leave. Troi's hand still held my arm. With a brutal jerk, the thug pulled me away, and said to my husband:

"Admit your crime, or I'll take you back to the General Police Department where you'll be tortured some more. Could you stand up to it?"

Troi answered:

"I committed no crime. I admit just one thing: I tried to kill McNamara but didn't succeed."

"If you don't confess, we'll give you some special treatment. If that happens, don't say we're cruel. If you don't make a clean breast of it, your wife will rot in jail."

Troi kept silent, staring at him defiantly. The thug said angrily:

"This is the last time I can keep open the door to freedom for you, and you still refuse. All the time you've been locked up here, you've gone on slandering the government and slinging mud at the American advisers. A tape-recorder has taken down everything you've told your companions here. Do you want it played back to hear all you've said? You tried to kill the American Defence Secretary, and now you've slandered the Nationalist Army and even insulted the Prime Minister!"

"I've never hidden my feelings and have always spoken out the plain truth. You've brought in newspapers in which the American advisers are praised to the skies, and called friends of the Vietnamese people. I've torn them up because I think they're telling lies. I feel I must make everyone who reads them recognize that the American advisers are the sworn enemy

of the Vietnamese people and should be destroyed, to the last man."

The policeman opened a folder containing papers which he wanted Troi to sign. He read them out, then said:

"You'll have to say exactly how much money you got from the Viet Cong for this job."

Troi remained lying on the bed, but raised his head slightly as he answered:

"I haven't opposed the Americans for money but because I want to kill them. Everything I've done was aimed at liberating South Vietnam and freeing her from oppression. That is the whole of it."

The thug turned to me:

"Tell your husband to confess. Otherwise he'll die."

I told the thug:

"I don't know anything about his activities; what should I ask him to confess to?"

Troi lay straight on the bed, his arms at his sides, his eyes staring at the ceiling, his face set and cold, completely ignoring everyone about him.

The policeman said:

"You're the one who wanted to blow up Cong Ly Bridge."

"My aim was to kill McNamara, the American Defence Secretary."

"You jumped out of the window to kill yourself and destroy all the clues, didn't you?"

"No, people like me never want to commit suicide. It was to live and continue trying to kill the American aggressors that I threw myself out of the window. If I had died, it would have been by accident."

The thugs took turns in questioning him, suggesting all sorts of slanderous motives for his action. Their aim was to slander his heroic attempt that the people of Saigon, particularly the

students and other young people, admired. They made him sit up and tried to force him to sign a folder of papers crammed with lies. After reading the papers, he took a pen and crossed out one line after another. The result was a criss-cross of pen strokes. Then he threw the pen in their faces and lay back on the bed.

Since they had failed to intimidate him, they threatened him with even more savage torture than before. They pushed me to the door and forbade me to say a word to Troi. In the courtyard, I stopped and cried. Then as I tried to rush back to my husband, two thugs grabbed my arms and dragged me to the car.

Back in my cell, I was surrounded by my prisoner friends. A. and Y. tried hard to console me. Later, whenever they saw my eyes filled with tears, they tried to distract me from my sorrow by telling me stories or urging me to do this or that. I had just finished sewing two snow-white pillow-cases. Sister Y. taught me how to embroider flowers on them and Troi's name and mine. Although her hands were still swollen because of the pin torture, she often took the needle to show me how to do the harder parts of the work. She said: "When you have embroidered the pillow-cases, take them to your husband and tell him that they are a wedding present from the inmates of Cell 4. Although they're a bit late, we do hope he'll accept them." When doing the work, we would softly sing the song *Making Clothes for Our Fighters*, Sister Y.'s favourite.

A new prisoner had arrived, a tiny tot of four, arrested at the same time as his grandmother. He had a round chest and chubby arms and looked as if he were a child of peasants. The guards let him wander freely in the courtyard. His grandmother was locked up in a cell some distance from mine. He walked past everyone of the cells peering curiously into each.

At times, he ran breathlessly after the birds which alighted in flocks in the courtyard, calling out to us to help him. Once a guard rode past on a motor bike. He shouted at him: "Hey, why are you using Uncle Troi's bike? Give it back or I'll tell Uncle."

His innocence made us laugh. Perhaps he had an uncle named Troi. Once he mentioned my name and asked to see me. Told to go to Cell 4, he came over and called out my name, "Auntie Quyen". That he knew my name surprised me. So I asked: "What do you want, little boy? I'm Auntie Quyen."

He held out an orange, saying quite distinctly:

"The uncles told me to bring you this orange. They ask if you're all right."

I reached out through the bars and took hold of his hand. I wanted to peel the orange for him, but he shook his head and said:

"The uncles gave me a lot."

Still clutching his plump hand, I asked him:

"What's your name?"

"Dan."

"Well, Dan, you go and tell the uncles that Auntie Quyen is all right and sends them many thanks."

He said: "Yes, Auntie," in a loud, clear voice and ran over to the men's block. He was a very bright lad. Soon he knew his way all over the compound. He took care to avoid the guards when, hiding his hands behind his back, he ran errands from one cell to another, bringing food to prisoners weakened by torture. He often brought cigarettes to Loi who had arrived recently and was locked up a few dozen yards from my cell.

Once when I was on a fatigue party, a man came up to me holding little Dan by the hand. He asked me:

"What's this? Don't you recognize your nephew? Little Dan knows your husband and often asks about him. He was thrown in jail with his grandmother because his family was suspected of being connected with Troi's activities."

Then turning to the child he said:

"This is Auntie Quyen, Uncle Troi's wife. Say good morning to her."

The child folded his arms on his chest to show respect and said politely:

"Good morning, Auntie Quyen."

Holding him on my lap, I asked him:

"So, you know Uncle Troi? Do you really know him?"

He nodded:

"Yes, he often brought me goodies. He came to our house on his motor bike."

"Do you know where Uncle Troi is now?"

"He's been sent to jail."

I burst out crying and clasped little Dan to my bosom. People who didn't know thought we were mother and child who had been separated for a long time. So the child had remembered Troi very well. It was obvious he felt a deep affection for him. He really thought the warder had been riding my husband's motor bike and wanted it back. A prisoner who came some time later told me that Troi had loved the child very much. When Dan was six months old, his mother had been arrested and beaten to death for refusing to salute the puppets' flag and "denounce Communists". His father had to work hard for a living and had almost no time to look after him. Troi felt sorry for the child. He often came to visit him, bringing him goodies and bathing him. The child's grandmother often said: "Dan thinks more of Troi than of his dad."

I thought I should take my husband's place in looking after the child. He made me feel less sad those days in prison. He chatted all day and asked a thousand and one questions. Sometimes, when he was angry with me, he would pout and say: "I'll tell Uncle Troi." Each time I gave him some fruit or sweets. I would say to him: "This is a present from Uncle Troi for his little Dan." Beaming with pleasure, he would ask me: "When will Uncle Troi come back?" Sometimes in the evening, his voice came from his grandmother's cell: "Auntie Quyen, do you miss Uncle Troi?" Everybody would burst out laughing and shout back to him to go to sleep.

Hearing the child talk about Troi all the time, other prisoners would often say half in jest: "If he had a son like Dan, how Troi would love him!" This would remind me of how my husband had longed for a son. "Not that I don't like daughters," he had said, "but somehow I would like our first child to be a boy."

I yearned to see my husband again. When I could, I would try to bring little Dan along. It would please him so much.

*That evening, Sister Quyen could not concentrate on the story she was telling me. She kept glancing at her watch. Then, from a neighbouring apartment, a woman's voice came ringing across: "Quyen, it's about time!"*

*Everybody around here had heard the announcement made over by Radio Hanoi the night before: this evening, at 8:30, there would be a broadcast of the whole text of narration of the film "Nguyen Van Troi will live forever" now being shown in the North.*

*From the very first minute, we all felt we were seeing the film itself, that we were following Troi as he walked to the execution ground. The voice of the narrator, now choked with emotion, now seething with hatred, took us through the various*

*scenes: Troi spoke to the journalists, he stopped before a patch of green vegetables, he tore the blindfold from his eyes. . . .*

*With the transistor set clasped in her arms, Quyen hung on to every word, every sound that came out of the loudspeaker, trying hard to control herself, as tears streamed down her face. From time to time, sobs shook the women delegates of Saigon.*

*Then the scene on the screen changed: the people of the Capital were holding demonstrations day and night; the streets were ablaze with torches; in a ceremony Troi was made an honorary worker of the Hanoi power plant; and an immense portrait of him had been set up on the highest point at the Thai Nguyen Iron and Steel Complex; his memory was being evoked in a classroom. . . .*

*"He still lives: all over the North, his portrait is everywhere, from the forests and the mountains to the islands, from the land to the sea. . . ."*

*Accompanying the sound of waves beating against the side of a ship, the commentator's voice took us — the dozen people listening to the broadcast in a small house in the liberated area of South Vietnam — on a journey "with Troi" on a patrol boat guarding the coast of the Fatherland night and day.*

*From the many radio sets in the neighbourhood (the whole of the area devoted to the Congress of South Vietnamese Women) came the low-pitched, emotion-choked voice of the poet To Huu reciting his poem "Remember My Words", which brought the broadcast to a close.*

*No sooner was the radio switched off than a lively discussion began among the women delegates from Saigon. Each had something to say: "The people of the North love Troi more than their own kin." — "Troi is now paying a real visit to the North." — "Troi has joined the Army of the North." — "He is now in the Navy." . . .*

*A woman professor, Sister U., gave us some more information about Troi's death:*

"Perhaps up there in the North," she said, "they have only a short film about Troi's death. A student, whose journalist brother was present at Chi Hoa on the day of Troi's execution, told his school friends that some journalists had managed to shoot quite a number of scenes of Troi, particularly when he was answering their questions. The U.S.-Khanh clique had invited many foreign journalists in the hope that when Troi faced the firing squad's guns he would break down and admit some of the crimes they had charged him with. Some pen hirelings and secret agents stood ready to trap him with provocative questions. But when they saw him step out of the condemned cell, they realized at once they could not shake him. Troi smiled at the journalists. Some of the people present were frightened about the imminent execution, but Troi himself was calm and dignified. He answered all the questions the journalists put. The student I speak of repeated what his brother had told him. Troi said: "You are journalists, and must be well informed about what is going on. The Americans have committed aggression against our country; they have been killing our people with planes and bombs. McNamara has worked out a whole plan for the conquest of South Vietnam. I love my Fatherland beyond measure. I cannot let the Americans trample on our land. I have never been against my people; I am against the Americans. I wanted to do away with McNamara who is the source of the many crimes committed in South Vietnam. . . ."

A journalist asked him: "Do you feel any regret before dying?"

He answered immediately: "My one regret is that I failed to kill McNamara."

When a Catholic priest wanted to give him absolution, he refused, saying: "I have committed no sin. It is the Americans who have sinned."

To the last minute of his life, he amazed everyone present. After the first volley, he was hit in the chest, but kept crying: "Long live Vietnam!"

Some of the journalists could not help crying. They had not believed that a man could face death so calmly, that he could feel such love for his country. Tearing the black blindfold from his eyes, Troi had said: "No! You must let me look at this land, my beloved land!"

For many years, the reactionaries had poisoned those men's minds, trying to convince them that "the Communists have no country"; but now some of the journalists saw the truth: No one loves the Vietnamese Fatherland as the Communists do: they love their native land to their last breath.

To his last breath, Troi fought resolutely. All the papers carrying news of his execution sold out in no time; every copy of *Dan Chu Moi* (New Democracy) was sold. People wanted to read its detailed report, including the fact that Troi had cried out three times: "Long live Ho Chi Minh!"

*Till late in the night, Quyen's fellow-delegates talked about the details of the heroic death of her husband and expressed their wish that a film would be made to reflect the whole of his life. Quyen could not continue her talk with me about Troi. She promised to go on the next evening.*

One morning, I was detailed to boil drinking water for a party of men prisoners who were building a new cell-block. Suddenly, a policeman bawled at me: "Phan Thi Quyen, report immediately to the office with all your belongings."

I had an idea what might happen to me. Prisoners ordered to report in this way to the office were to be exiled to some

distant place. People who were working around, cutting iron rods, or carrying bricks and mortar, left their work and surrounded me. Each put in a word to comfort me. They said that wherever I might be taken I should try to be worthy of my husband, who was such a staunch fighter.

My only wish at that moment was that Troi should be told what had happened, so he would not worry if I did not come and see him. So I told the men around:

"My guess is that when Troi recovers his health he'll be brought back here. But if any of you should meet him, in some other prison, please tell him that all the time I was here, was well and cheerful. Tell him they've taken me away, I don't know where yet. If I don't see him for a long time, tell him not to worry. When I'm released, I will look for him even if he gets a life sentence."

A man with scars all over his neck and shoulders, who had often given me part of the food his family brought him, said:

"Don't worry. When we meet Troi, we'll tell him how his wife behaved in prison. He'll be so pleased. The country will soon be reunified and you two will meet again. Cheer up."

They all respected Troi greatly and sympathized with me. They included people from the North, the Centre, and the South. Most of them were crippled or in bad health. Many had been confined in all kinds of prisons: B. 42, Le Van Duyet, Phu Loi, Bien Hoa, Thu Duc, Gia Dinh, before coming to this one under the General Police Department.

When I returned to the women's block, everyone knew that I and a few others, among them little Dan and his grandmother, were starting out on exile. They brought me all sorts of gifts: clothes, soap, towels, and food, so that I would suffer less in my new prison. Everyone urged me not to cry, but their eyes were all filled with tears. Sister Y., my music and

embroidery "teacher", gave me very short advice: "Sing more than you cry. If you must cry, don't cry before the enemy."

In the few minutes that were left, I repeated to the other prisoners what I had said to the men prisoners. When I walked out into the courtyard holding little Dan by the hand, Sister X. called me back. She felt it necessary to tell me once again:

"Remember, they often play upon a wife's weakness to influence her husband. Wherever you are taken, be vigilant, don't fall into their trap, and don't be a burden to Troi."

But something completely unexpected happened. After an hour's waiting in the prison office, they released three of us: little Dan, his grandmother and me. No reason was given. I wanted to tell the news to the other prisoners, but the guards would not let me.

I went back to my job of packing cotton wool. I worked extra hours at noon and night so that I could buy some food for Troi from time to time and pay off our wedding expenses. He had been moved to another hospital, Cho Quan. The rules for visiting prisoners hospitalized there were very strict, especially for those who had not yet been brought to trial. Every time I visited Troi, I was not the only one to cry bitterly. Tears would stream down the faces of those visiting their relatives who were prisoner-patients in Cho Quan, because the treatment was really barbarous.. My visits were usually like this: I would stand at the gate trying to peer into the courtyard through a hole in the door. Troi would stand behind a wall topped with iron bars, about fifteen yards away. I could see the upper half of his body, but he would be able to see only a pair of eyes: I had to shout so that he would know it was me. Scores of people took turns at this hole to get a glimpse of their loved one; one hardly had time to locate one's husband or son when someone tried jostling for place.

The first time I came and waited beside the iron gate, a woman told me and the others around:

"It has taken me four years to find out that my husband is locked up here. Last time I came, only my son managed to catch a glimpse of his father. Please let me stay a bit longer at the hole because I must go back to Hue soon."

The previous time, her eight-year-old son had caught a glimpse of his father, tried to sneak into the yard on the heels of a policeman, and had been caught, beaten up and thrown out.

There was a small gate beside the big one for the police to come and go. Food could be handed in at that gate for the prisoner-patients. Once, taking advantage of the time it took the door-keeper to take my packages for Troi, I managed to keep the door open for a minute or two. Seeing me, Troi was beside himself with joy. He cried out:

"You've been released, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"How are you?"

"I'm fine."

Leaning on his crutches, he came to the iron-barred window, put out his hand and waved at me. But the door was slammed in my face before I could say another word to him.

I hurriedly ran to the hole in the bigger gate and peered in. He was still clutching the iron bars, a puzzled look on his face. I called his name, stuck my arm through the hole and waved at him. The guard inside bawled insults at me and threw a stone which luckily only hit the gate with a bang. His heart torn with pity, my husband shouted:

"Quyen dear, come only once in two weeks. You can't go on visiting me several times a week like this, it's such an ordeal each time. Do you hear me, Quyen?"

Choking back my sobs, I answered:

"Even if it were ten times as miserable, I'd go on visiting you. Don't worry about me, darling."

I kept hoping to bring him enough food and tried in every way to do so. I had found out that prisoner-patients at Cho Quan hospital were doomed to slow death. The food was filthy. The prisoners were locked up with people with contagious diseases: T.B. and even leprosy. I wanted to help Troi regain his health so that his third attempt to escape would have a fair chance of success.

My mother also wanted to see him, but I had kept her from coming so far. It would be too much of an ordeal for her not to be able to say a word to her dear son-in-law. But now she refused to listen and insisted on coming along on my next visit, bringing my youngest sister Can. She said:

"I will be satisfied just to look at him for a minute, or even for a second. I miss him so much."

My mother was very fond of my husband. She had had eleven children but she loved this son-in-law best. When a fire had broken out in Khanh Hoi, the working-class neighbourhood where we lived, Troi had been in the group of workers who left work to help put out the fire. He himself had saved most of our possessions by carrying them out of the house. After that the people there had great respect for him and my mother had tremendous affection for him.

So I had to let my mother come. I was lucky enough to hold the gate open for a minute or two. Seeing my husband, my mother cried out:

"Tu* dear, it's me, mother, who's come to visit you. Are you all right?"

Little Can shouted excitedly:

"Brother Tu, Brother Tu!"

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* Tu (fourth). Parents often call their children in order of their age.

Troi smiled and said something which I could not make out amidst the general turmoil — cries and shouts from within and without the compound. Tears running down her cheeks, my mother lingered at the gate for a long time. A dozen mothers were telling each other about their common misfortunes. A policeman, getting out of a car, walked up to them and said to one:

"You here again! Everywhere I go I run into you. Is your daughter ill that she is in here?"

The woman turned and coldly stared at him without saying a word. I recognized her as Aunt M. whom I had met a few days earlier. It had been the Wednesday of the previous week, and it had been raining hard. Clinging to the gate, I had peered through the little square hole but could not see my husband clearly through the mist of the rain. I had tried to call him, but the noise of the downpour drowned my voice. Drenched to the skin I had leaned against the gate in despair and cried. Someone had put a raincoat over my shoulders and pulled me to a spot under the eaves of a nearby building. It was Aunt M. When she had learned that I was Troi's wife, she hugged me, and said: "I should have guessed it sooner. I've seen you around here several times."

Now, the policeman said:

"I told you before: Just persuade your daughter to salute the flag, even once, and admit that the Communists are a bunch of terrorists, and she will be released immediately. You've been running around four or five years, following her from one prison to another to look after her and making yourself miserable."

Aunt M. answered:

"I gave birth to her so it's my duty to look after her. Whether she salutes your flag or not, whether she considers the Com-

munists good or bad is up to her. I can't force an opinion on my daughter."

On the tenth time I came to see Troi at Cho Quan hospital he was no longer there. The door-keeper told me vaguely: "Your husband was getting better, he was sent back to the prison."

As I suspected, Troi had been sent back to the cells in the General Police Department. Sister X., after her successful escape from jail, later told me this story about him:

"On the morning of August 4th, while the prison courtyard was still crowded with prisoners at work, a hospital van came to a stop almost opposite the women's cell-block. The door of the van had just been opened when we heard someone inside say loudly: 'I can walk by myself.' Then we saw a prisoner waving aside two police thugs. But he could not walk. He crawled on the floor of the car, dragging a leg all wrapped up in bandages. He wore a pair of shorts and a grey shirt. When he looked up, I recognized him immediately and cried out: 'It's Troi come back!' All the women prisoners rushed to the veranda, which was forbidden. Joy filled everyone's heart. People said: 'Here is Quyen's husband. Troi's come back!' The news swept all the cells and cries of joy resounded, 'Brother Troi is back!' The men prisoners came running, sweat trickling down their bodies, their arms and legs caked with dirt and mortar. They surrounded the van and asked excitedly. 'Where is Troi?' By this time, Troi had reached the door. Immediately a dozen backs bent forward and pressed close to the back of the van. Troi reached out and clasped the back of a prisoner, his cheeks resting against his comrade's. The others supported his body and legs. It all happened so fast that the thugs were taken completely by surprise. They shouted and cursed, 'Clear off! Who let you come near this

rascal?' Then they tried to pull Troi away from his friends, but couldn't. Clinging to the iron-barred windows, we women prisoners yelled at them: 'You swine, how dare you ill-treat a wounded man. It's barbarous, barbarous!' The men prisoners surrounded Troi and brought him to building C, where every newcomer was brought first to present his papers. Only after they had laid him comfortably on a couch did they leave him to go on with their drudgery.

"The following morning, August 5th, at nine o'clock, Troi was brought out of his cell to stand trial. Leaning on his friend Loi, he walked with great difficulty to the far corner of the women's cell-block, where he waited until a van came for him."

After a short pause, Sister X. told me in detail about what she called "those ten precious minutes" in her life, when she had been near Troi:

"I was not quite three yards away from him. You remember the layout, don't you? The women's block faces the small desk of the warder in charge of the coming and going of the prison vans. Troi was sitting on a chair beside the desk. He wore a grey shirt and blue trousers and his hair was combed neatly. He was not as thin as when you visited him at the hospital, and looking healthy. He did not smile but looked at us cheerfully. The thugs did not want us to get too close to him and tried to drive us away by threatening to beat us up. But we just sat, over a dozen of us, and refused to budge. Finally they had to give up. Troi half turned and sat facing the women's block. There was a bright expression in his eyes: it seemed as if he wanted to smile and say something to us. We reminded each other in whispers to give him your message, but we could not. Four thugs were standing guard around him, and three of them never left him for even a second. You probably remember them: Giap, Luc and Tam Hieu. Troi

hadn't sat for more than a minute or two when Luc, that sickly-looking rascal with a bony face, asked him sarcastically:

"You're still young and I know your wife is young and pretty. You're newly-weds. Why don't you think about your own happiness? Why did you let yourself be tricked by the Viet Cong into committing such a crime?"

Troi turned his eyes away from us. Smiling wryly, he replied: "A crime? It's thinking of my future that made me do it. Can killing American aggressors be called a crime?"

"How can you say that you did the right thing? You are crippled, that's the outcome of the Viet Cong's work."

Troi replied, this time in a louder voice, looking the thug in the face:

"No one tricked me. I hate the American aggressors. I hate McNamara who has caused so much suffering in the South. That's why I tried to kill him."

Giap, that notorious thug of Gia Dinh jail, sat facing him and said:

"The result is clear enough, isn't it? It didn't bring you any good. You broke your leg and you're in jail."

Anger filled Troi's face. Holding on to the edge of the desk tightly he said in a slow voice, stressing each word:

"Let me tell all of you this: I did the right thing. I tried to kill aggressors. Even if it was dangerous, even if I was wounded or crippled or killed, I feel happy about it. I can't live like those toadies who do harm to their countrymen in return for a secure life."

Giap retorted, stony-faced:

"Toadies, did you say?"

Troi nodded. Our hearts beat faster. The thugs around him growled like wild animal, but they could not scare him. I was deeply touched by this example of fearlessness, more so than any time before. I was proud to stand in the same ranks

with him, to be his comrade. He bore himself so firmly, turning right and left to face each of them, replying sharply to every cowardly attack.

Giap said cynically:

"All right. But we've never had a hard day in our lives. We have plenty to eat. Our wives and children are happy. If you keep talking this way and show no regret, how can you hope for leniency?"

Troi looked disgusted. He shook his head, and said: "I can't live like you, really I can't. I'd rather die than live such a life."

Tam Hieu, that tall red-faced thug, laughed and pointed to Troi's broken leg:

"You're being stubborn right at death's door. Just look, that broken leg of yours is the result of listening to the Viet Cong."

Troi could no longer contain himself. He stood up despite his injured leg, thrusting out his arm. He took a few steps, then without turning to look at the thugs, said in a loud voice:

"You're filthy scum. I won't say another word to you."

Loi had been sitting with his back against the wall. He sprang to his feet and ran to Troi's side lest he fall. But at that moment, I saw extraordinary strength in Troi. He stood upright, looking at the sky.

As soon as the van came, they pushed him in. That morning he and Loi were to be tried. We all stood up as the van drove away, calling to him and waving. Holding on to the door of the car, he turned and looked back at us.

That day and the days that followed, whenever I met other prisoners, they would ask me to tell them about those precious ten minutes when I had been so close to Troi. And from then on, whenever one of us was called to the torture chamber or

sent into exile, we would spontaneously say to each other: "Let's be as brave as Troi, let's live like him."

Day after day, events were on the march in the streets of Saigon. Demonstrations were held even at night. The people living around my parents' place – house painters, stevedores, pedicab drivers, students, workers at the power station and sugar refinery – stopped work and marched with banners flying to Khanh's headquarters to demand his resignation. Nguyen Khanh* who had signed the order for my husband's execution, was now being condemned and reviled by all the people. While I was in prison, I heard our comrades there saying that, if the two million people of Saigon were to rise up against the puppets, and the attack were coordinated with one from the outside, the enemy would be finished. I was living on my nerves, and this thought kept going round in my mind: if the people of Saigon rise up, I'll run to the prison and help tear it down brick by brick to set my husband free. But in what prison was he now being held? Since August 17, when he was sentenced to death, I had been trying to locate him.

I was half mad with worry. Was he still in the Chi Hoa jail? They might have killed him while sending me on a fool's errand from prison to prison. I went to inquire at the office of the condemned ward.

As I was waiting for one of the guards to give me an answer, I heard a voice calling: "Quyen! Quyen!"

It was my husband! As I rushed out of the office, a prison van drove past. There was Troi's face pressed to a small wire mesh window. He kept calling me and waving. Horrified, I ran after the van, screaming: "They're going to kill him. Save

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* General Nguyen Khanh was then the head of the Saigon puppet government.

my husband!" The van turned the corner and vanished. I stood in the middle of the road in a cloud of dust, looking around wildly for help. "Troi! Troi!" I kept screaming. A guard stuck his head through a small window and yelled at me:

"What's all the fuss? They're only taking your husband to be photographed. He'll be back this afternoon. I'll give you a pass. Come back at three and you can see him."

Not believing him, I demanded:

"Are you really telling the truth?"

"Of course. Here's your pass."

Only then did I feel reassured. I came back at three. In the visitors' room for the condemned, Troi was waiting for me. He was lying on the bench, his head resting on his arm. Next to him was a fellow-prisoner who had helped him come down from the third floor. A policeman was sitting at a small table a few yards away. When Troi's friend saw me coming, he got up and walked away. Troi looked at me, then sat up. He was dressed in a white shirt and striped shorts.

I took a tighter grip on the food basket I was carrying. I mustn't let it fall. I remembered the advice of my prison mates: "Keep your chin up! No matter what happens, don't cry! Crying only makes it harder for those you love." I didn't want to make Troi anxious about me in the few days left to his life. But tears ran down my cheeks, making my lips salty. I wanted to call out his name, but my throat was tight. I bit my lips to keep from bursting out crying and went up to him silently. He held out both arms to me, grasped me firmly by the wrists and drew me down beside him on the bench. I put my head on his shoulder, no longer able to contain my sorrow. I wanted to speak, but I couldn't even utter his name. I leaned against him and wept.

He gently stroked my hair for a while, then said: "When you read the news it must have come as a great shock." Chok-

ing with sobs, I replied: "What can I say? Friends and relatives came to break the news gently, and they cried, too. For days, I tried to find out what prison you had been sent to. Father has asked a lawyer to demand a reprieve."

Troi looked annoyed, and said:

"Don't get a lawyer. It's just a waste of money."

Then, as he dried my tears, he added:

"Knowing me has brought you much suffering. Do you hold it against me?"

"I love you — how could I hold anything against you? I sometimes misjudged you, but when I was in prison, the comrades educated me and made me see my mistakes. How ashamed I was! You must understand! I had no idea that you were doing revolutionary work, so I was often suspicious and that made me quarrelsome. I made it harder for you to do your work."

"Just before our wedding," he said, "I was very busy preparing for my task. I had to be away from home day and night. In this sort of activity, the rule is absolute secrecy, so I had to lie to you. That's what made you suspect I was being untrue to you. I knew it, and I felt sorry for you.

"Since our marriage, we haven't even been able to take that walk together that I promised you. I know I haven't treated you right, but I couldn't have done otherwise. Sometimes I gave silly answers to your questions. Even right after our wedding I went out every evening and didn't come back until very late. I had meetings, and besides that, I had to study the enemy's movements so as to set up my apparatus at the right place. I've made a poor showing as a husband! When you were upset I'd dismiss it by saying that I was busy or up to my ears in work. If I were you I'd have been suspicious too. You've been a loyal wife — any other woman wouldn't have stood for it. I knew you were miserable, but I couldn't explain

to you. I kept thinking I'd do it after my mission. But now you understand, don't you?"

"I understood the moment they brought you home in handcuffs."

"I've said many times that I hate liars and cheats. I also told you that one shouldn't lie even about small things. And yet I deceived you. But I'm not ashamed, because I did it for the revolution. In the future, if you have revolutionary tasks in a city like Saigon that's infested with police and secret agents, you may have to tell stories too, in order to keep your work secret."

I took out an orange and started to peel it for Troi but he stopped me.

"I'll eat later. We have only a few moments and there are many things I must tell you. When they brought me back to the cell at the General Police Department, other prisoners told me everything you had asked them. They said you had made a lot of progress, that you listened to their advice and began to understand many things. It was music to my ears! I still hope to escape from prison, but the enemy may do anything at any time. If the worst should happen, I hope you'll carry on with our friends."

He had been speaking in guarded terms, but I understood what he meant and the terrible thing that might happen. He took out a handkerchief and wiped away my tears. His voice was uneven as he whispered in my ear:

"My comrades will see to it that you aren't left alone. You saw that for yourself when you were in prison. I am not the only one; thousands of older comrades stay loyal to the revolution in spite of cruelty and torture. You meet people in the streets: they are not working just for their daily bowl of rice. They are taking part in the revolution, each at his own task. Many have lost a husband, son or brother. Follow their

example. You should do some revolutionary work, even if it's only distributing leaflets or spreading some good news."

"But I'm afraid they won't trust me," I told him. "I do want to do revolutionary work. Now that you've been arrested, I want more than ever to be given a chance to do my part in the struggle like my prison comrades."

He turned to another question which he said had been worrying him:

"Is it true they've bombed the North?"

"Yes."

"How many times?"

"Only once."*

"Did our people shoot down any planes?"

"Four American planes."

"Did we suffer any damage?"

"Not so much. Only some villages along the coast were hit."

He nodded his head several times, looking very pleased.

"They'll only be rushing to their graves if they attack the North. If they begin again, follow the news carefully and tell me all about it – if you're allowed to come and see me again."

He asked about our friends, and then said:

"When you see our relatives, apologize for me. They were at our wedding, but I haven't gone to visit them. Mother is very sad, isn't she?"

The guard cut short our talk by announcing that time was up. I helped Troi to his feet and embraced him. I had a feeling I would never see him again. I forced myself to ask a last question:

"Will I see you again?"

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* It was then August 1964. The first U.S. air-raid on North Vietnam took place on August 5, 1964.

He took me in his arms and kissed me. His cheeks were wet with my tears. He searched my face and said:

"We will meet again. Believe that."

My hands were clutching his shoulders as he gently pushed my head away and caressed my hair. Then he said:

"Try to live like your prison comrades. Learn to endure suffering. Have courage."

I helped him to the other end of the room and there another prisoner supported him towards the stairs. I followed them with my eyes until they disappeared at a turn. Then I left.

I could hardly wait for the 30th of August, when I was to see him again. Would that be the last time? I got all kinds of things ready for him. I embroidered our names on the clothes and haversack and carved them on a pair of plastic chopsticks and a cup. I remembered all the poems my prison mates had taught me. The one I liked best I embroidered on a handkerchief. It took me several nights because every stitch had to be carefully made. What a big surprise for Troi: he would never believe I had done it all by myself. When the embroidery was done, I took the piece of cloth to my parents' home where I hemmed it on my mother's sewing-machine. My sister read out the poem to my father.

*Through waves and wind, in tempest and in storm*
*My heart will remain true to you*
*May you be safe from danger*
*And return in glory the day our country is reunified.*

"Good heavens!" my father cried out. "You're in enough trouble already! If the police catch you with that, they'll beat you to death."

"Don't worry, I won't be caught!"

On the morning of August 30, I went to the Chi Hoa jail. No sooner had I set foot in the prison office than the police sergeant in charge stuck his finger in my face and said:

"The authorities have issued orders that you may not visit Nguyen Van Troi any more. What did you tell him the last time you were here that made him stir up so much trouble afterwards?"

"I only asked about his health and we talked of family affairs. I didn't say anything else to him."

"Well, you can't come," he said shortly. "That's an order from my superiors."

Nothing I said was of any use. He even refused to give my husband the food and fruit I had brought. At the gate of the prison, I met Mrs. M. She burst into tears when she saw me.

"Your husband's been sentenced to death, hasn't he?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You've come to see him?"

"Yes, but they wouldn't let me in."

She offered to give my husband the food and fruit. She also told me what to do to get a pass for another visit. I was lucky to have run into her. Her daughter had recently been transferred from Cho Quan hospital to Chi Hoa prison. In the course of following her from one prison to another and looking after her over many years, Mrs. M. had struck up an acquaintance with a number of policemen and learned how to deal with them.

It wasn't till September 18 that I was told to come to Chi Hoa jail where I would be given a pass and told what day I could see my husband. When I got there, however, the policeman in charge said I could visit him that very afternoon. He added:

"Your husband has become a Catholic. The priest has baptized him."

I ran out of the prison gate, and bought whatever food I could lay my hands on, fruit in particular. Troi did not smoke and was not a tea drinker, but he was very fond of fruit. My arms full of parcels, I hurried to the visitors' room. I went up to my husband.

"You waited a long time for me, didn't you?"

He gently brushed back a few strands of hair that clung to my sweating cheeks and forehead saying:

"It's been quite a time. Why are you so out of breath?"

"I didn't think they would let me see you today, so I haven't brought you your clothes and haversack. I just got the pass today. Usually I can't visit you till two days after they issue the pass, but today they said that some special event was going to take place here in a few days and that if I wanted to see you I'd better do it today. So I ran out to buy some food for you, and rushed back so you wouldn't have to wait too long."

Taking a look at my parcels, he said:

"You're spending too much money. I don't need all that. You should save the money to pay off our wedding expenses."

"Don't worry about the debts. I can manage all right. Is it true that you have become a Catholic? They told me you'd been converted."

"Who said so?" he asked in amazement.

"The man in the prison office."

"That's a lie. I would never do that. Some priests came and tried to convert me, but I refused. Don't believe anything they tell you. They're spreading lies to make the comrades on the outside believe I'm gradually being won over to the other side."

"When did they take off the bandages?" I asked, touching his leg.

"On the 15th. How are father and mother?"

"They're all right. Little Can keeps asking to see you. I'd like to bring Little Dan along too, but I'm being so closely watched by the police that I'm afraid to get his family into trouble."

"What did Can say after she visited me in hospital?"

"She boasted that she's seen 'Big Brother Tu', that he walked with two sticks and had smiled at her."

"I love that child. She waved her hand and called out 'Big Brother!' What a pity I couldn't come closer to see her. I'd have liked to rush out and hug her. You may be able to visit me again around the end of this month — be sure to bring her along. Buy some goodies for Little Dan and tell him they're from Uncle Troi. He's like me when I was his age, hungry for affection. Look after him for me, will you?"

I lowered my voice to a whisper.

"What did you start doing after my last visit? They said you stirred up all kinds of trouble and they forbade me to come again."

"I told the other prisoners the good news, to make them happy. I told them that the Americans had bombed North Vietnam and hadn't caused much damage, but on the contrary had lost a number of planes. All the comrades rejoiced, and the whole condemned block became restless. Your news showed up the lies of those gangsters!"

"You were disappointed when I didn't visit you on the 30th, weren't you? Mrs. M., who got someone to bring you the parcels of food, said you were restless that day — that you couldn't stay still."

Troi laughed.

"I waited all afternoon on pins and needles for the guard to call me to the visitors' room. I was longing to see you. I had a photograph of you but they discovered it and tore it up.

By the time evening came and you hadn't turned up, I was very worried. I didn't know whether you were sick or had been arrested."

A woman prisoner came down from the condemned block and went over to sit with her mother at the other end of the bench. Her mother was weeping, her words broken by sobs. She had a Hue accent.

I told Troi about his relatives from Quang Nam who had tried in vain to visit him.

"Are they still here?" he asked.

"No, they've gone back."

"Please write and tell them I'm all right. And where is Brother Bay? Has he been released?"

"Yes."

With a note of regret in his voice, Troi said:

"Give him my regards. He was arrested simply because he lived in the same house we do. Tell him not to worry. He won't have to sell the house and move away. Where would you live if he sold it?"

A policeman came up and handed me a paper. Troi looked at the attached photograph and said:

"When was that taken?"

"Recently. Requests to visit prisoners must be accompanied by photographs."

"You look so thin and pale in the photo."

He gave me a worried look.

"You're very pale – why?"

"I'm all right."

"Do our neighbours still let you take baths at their place?"

"Yes. They're always good to me."

He reminded me of the steps.

"They're quite steep. Take only half a bucket of water at a time so you won't fall."

"Don't worry about such little things. I've changed a lot. I'm quite strong now. I'm not afraid to go into the courtyard by myself any more."

He changed the conversation.

"What's the situation in the city?"

"The administration has made a few concessions so there aren't so many demonstrations. When that coup took place I didn't sleep a wink all night waiting for the sound of gunfire. But when morning came and the situation returned to normal, I was so disappointed. But there's been a lot of fighting outside the city. Lorry and taxi drivers living near us say that they often meet Liberation troops. Sometimes the Liberation men stop hundreds of cars and buses and hold meetings. From our place, we often hear gunfire at night. Do you?"

He nodded and continued listening intently.

"Our friends from Quang Nam say that your home district has been almost entirely liberated. There are thousands of Liberation troops all over the place. Their weapons are much more modern than during the War of Resistance to the French. Even in Saigon the situation is quite different from what it was just a few months ago. If you could get out you'd see it for yourself. Even little kids call Nguyen Khanh names. No one has any respect for the 'government.' Students and other young people surrounded his house and forced him to come out and make a public apology. Do you think things can go like this for much longer?"

I took his hand. I thought he was not as thin as he had been. Blue veins no longer stood out on his hand like they had when I had seen him in hospital. Touching his finger, he smiled.

"I've sold my wedding ring. The day I went to plant the mine I ran short of wire. I had no time to get in touch with the organization and no money on me. The only thing I had

that could be sold easily was the ring. So I sold it. I told myself if I'm willing to give up my life, why hesitate to sell a ring? When you asked me about it, I couldn't think of a good answer and said it interfered with my work. Were you angry?"

Burying my face in his hands, I cried:

"Oh, don't talk about it. I was so ignorant. If I had won your confidence, you'd have asked me to buy the wire for you. I wouldn't have failed you."

"I got this assignment just before our wedding. You now know it was a very dangerous job. The Command wanted to give me a few days' leave for a honeymoon, but I insisted on carrying on. I'd waited so long for a chance to kill the American aggressors that now that I had the opportunity to get one of their chiefs, I just couldn't give it up. I kept everything from you because I didn't want you to worry. I intended to bring you into the organization after I had fulfilled my assignment. I always hoped that some day you would be my comrade as well as my wife."

He sat silently for a while, then asked:

"Are you pregnant?"

I shook my head.

"No."

I felt he was disappointed, so I said nothing. Then the guard came and said that time was up. A fellow-prisoner of Troi's age came in and Troi introduced him.

"My friends here help me a lot."

"My husband is ill," I said to his friend. "I am grateful to you for looking after him."

"Don't mention it. People in jail together must help each other. That doesn't call for thanks. We always look after each other. So don't worry."

When I gave Troi my parcels at the turning, he told me once more:

"If you are allowed to come again, don't spend so much money on food for me."

Mrs. M. treated me like a foster-daughter. When she saw me working and struggling to take care of Troi in spite of my illness, she felt sorry for me.

"When I was your age," she said, "my husband was in prison too, and I suffered just like you. I visited him and brought food to him. He was released, then thrown in jail again, and finally died in that same Chi Hoa prison."

She had two sons and one daughter. One of the sons had been studying in the Soviet Union for seven or eight years now, and the other, a soldier, had been regrouped to the North. Her daughter had been arrested four years ago when she was caught distributing leaflets announcing the founding of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation. Mrs. M. lived with a niece, and peddled things for a living. She showed me a few photographs that had been smuggled to her. They had been taken in the Soviet Union and in the North: her son in white overalls sitting before a control panel full of dials; Hanoi on National Day; her daughter-in-law — a textile worker — standing on a high balcony with her children. Mrs. M. told me about each photograph.

"We'll be happy like them some day," she said.

She was a tender-hearted woman. When I visited Troi for the third time, she sent a lot of presents to him.

"Tell him," she said, "that I don't think as often of my sons in the Soviet Union and the North, who are now living a happy life, as of my two children in Chi Hoa jail." She meant her own daughter and my husband.

This time I brought Little Can. We went along the corridor to the place where Troi usually waited for me. Can spotted him first and called out: "Brother Tu!"

I felt so happy: he looked healthier, his face wasn't so thin and he had had his hair cut. He walked towards the door, still dragging his leg which had not entirely healed and hugged Little Can. He put his cheek against her head and asked me:

"Are father and mother well?"

"They're fine. You've gained a bit of weight, haven't you?"

He smiled. Never since his arrest had he looked so well. Taking my hand, he said:

"I'll keep putting on weight. But you're still too thin. You're driving yourself too hard."

I tried to answer in such a way as to reassure him.

"Not at all. I'm following your advice and not working more than eight hours a day."

Little Can, still clasped in his arms, looked close at his face and asked:

"Which of your legs is hurt?"

He pointed to his right leg.

"This one, but it's much better now."

She pursed her lips.

"Then hold me."

He lifted her onto his lap.

"Are you going to school?" he asked. "Have you learned how to read?"

"Yes, I've learned the alphabet. Today Sister Quyen got me excused from school to visit you. Where do you live?"

"Upstairs. On the third floor. Very high."

"May I go up and see?"

Troi laughed.

"You can't, I'm in jail."

"When are you coming back home?"

Troi made a promise.

"At the Lunar New Year. I'll come back then for sure. Be a good little girl and remember to go and visit Sister Quyen once in a while."

"Every time I visit her she's crying," Can said impishly.

Troi looked concerned.

"Why should you cry all the time?"

"But I don't," I tried to argue.

"Why would she say that if it weren't so? She's too little to lie. If she says you've been crying, then you have."

I couldn't think of anything to say, so I sat silently. Troi continued:

"You're living in the midst of a constantly growing movement, you ought to be happy and share in everyone's joy. In the past few days the comrades in the cells have been singing with all their hearts. A general strike in Saigon! Saigon without water and electricity! What joy! Before, when a strike was called, only one industry or at the most a few took part. This time everyone has joined in. When I was admitted into the Youth League, I was sent to take a short course. The lecturer was a wonderful fellow; he explained many things to me. I was a worker, but it wasn't until I took that course that I realized the potential strength of our class, the working class. The lecturer once said to me: 'You're an electrician, aren't you? Well then, tell me, how many electrical appliances do you have in your home?' 'Not a one,' I answered. 'The only light we have is from kerosene lamps. And the same goes for almost the whole district where I live.' He smiled. 'Electricians going without electricity. Does that seem right? Go and have a look at the American quarters. Even the kennels for their dogs have electric lights. Let the electricians stop work for just one day and the entire city would go pitch-dark. The whole bunch of them would have to grope around

with torches – what do they know about running electric generators?' I listened to him spellbound, but I couldn't imagine that the workers would agree to stop work all at the same time, as a show of strength. But the other day suddenly there *was* no electricity and no running water in the whole prison compound, the noise of traffic stopped and we heard the news: a general strike had broken out in Saigon. Traffic had come to a standstill, there was no market, the whole city was paralyzed. How happy we were! We made the whole condemned block echo with revolutionary songs. The guards rushed in and started beating us, but we went on singing. Even if they killed us, we knew our strength was immense and that they would soon be crushed."

The policeman at the desk was looking through some magazines. I quickly opened the haversack and took out the suit I had made for Troi. The embroidered handkerchief lay at the bottom. I took it and holding it tightly in my hand, I asked him in a whisper:

"The things I bring you, do they examine them when you go back to your cell?"

He nodded.

"They do."

I unfolded the clothes, folded them, and unfolded them again several times, to divert the attention of the policeman. Then I showed Troi the handkerchief and asked him:

"Do you think you can take it with you?"

He looked in astonishment at the poem embroidered on it in red.

"But who did the embroidery?" he asked.

I was very pleased by his question, which I had been waiting eagerly for.

"I did," I said. "The women in prison taught me how."

Troi's face had lost its severity, he looked entirely content.

"You're a wonderful housewife," he said, smiling. "If you had stayed in jail a few months more, you'd have learned even more interesting things. All right, now I know the poem by heart. Back in the cell, I'll recite it to the other prisoners. Hide it and take it back home. If they search you and find it, they'll beat you."

"They also helped me embroider flowers on a pair of pillow-cases which turned out to be just as beautiful as those we got as a wedding present. They said these pillow-cases were their wedding present to us."

"They taught you a lot of songs, didn't they?"

"Quite a few: *Making Clothes for Our Fighters, By the Hienluong Bridge, The Song of Hope, The Communist Spirit, Your Native Land Is the Communist Spring,* and several poems like *The Song of the Man Condemned to Death, Let's March Forward. . . .*"

As I named each song and poem, he repeated the names and counted them. Then he said:

"So you've learned Communist songs, too. That's good. As a worker you must know them. The older comrades have told me that when we have built a Communist society, everyone will be happy, everyone will enjoy the fruits of his labour and no one will be unhappy. The North has already started in this direction. I want to live and fight like a Communist, although I'm not one yet."

"I don't know them properly because I couldn't write them down. The comrade who taught us the songs was beaten up for doing it. But when she got back to her cell, she began again, though we urged her not to. She said: 'Teaching songs in prison is revolutionary work, and so is learning them, because it makes you confident and optimistic.' "

"If it weren't for that swine over there, I'd ask you to sing a few lines. Our prison comrades love us because we share

the same ideal. Try to follow their example, darling. With or without me, live like them. Be faithful to the revolution like them. If you see any of them again, please say that I thank them for the care and education they have given my wife."

He looked thoughtful for some time, then he spoke in a less serious vein. Stroking my hair, he soothed me.

"Now you're crying again. Please don't. Learn to endure hardships. Remember, you asked your fellow-prisoners at the General Police Department to tell me how cheerful you were, singing all the time you were there."

He smiled at me, forcing himself to look cheerful, but his eyes were filled with tears. He started talking about projects for the distant future, to keep me from worrying whether he was to die. He played with Little Can and promised her that when he got out he would take her for a walk in the park near the wharf and treat her to cakes (right after the wedding ceremony, on our way home, we had taken a walk there with the child). He asked me to keep his mandolin in good condition: on moonlight nights the children in the neighbourhood used to come to hear him play.

When it was time for me to go, he said:

"On October 15th, if they allow you to send in packages but not to see me, write me a letter. I'll look forward to it."

*While she was telling me her story, Quyen often attended meetings held by groups of young women guerrillas, who described battles waged to avenge Troi which they had commanded or in which they had taken part. In our final talk Quyen confided to me:*

"How many battles they have fought! I was amazed to hear about them. These comrades are my age, 20, but I felt I was a child listening to the experience of my elders. There

was a girl as small as I who has fought in over one hundred engagements and can handle four or five kinds of weapons. She has even captured a number of Yankees. I listened to their stories spellbound, wondering whether I could go with them when the Congress is over. If I can't, then I want to serve in an army unit. My husband was a Liberation fighter in a secret commando unit operating in Saigon. Soon after he joined the Army he was given the task of killing McNamara. He had dreamed of becoming a Liberation fighter and fighting in Saigon itself. In his application volunteering for the army, which his commander has kept, he told why he hated the imperialists, and swore to 'fight to his last breath.' I want to follow his example, to avenge him; I want to fight the enemy, gun in hand, or to do something, anything, to serve the Liberation fighters. They were my husband's comrades-in-arms."

*I hesitated, not knowing what to say, she added:*

"I have asked my friends, the women guerrillas, and they said it is not so difficult to fight guerrilla warfare. Anybody can be a guerrilla if he hates the enemy; the deeper his hatred, the better he'll fight. It doesn't take long to learn to handle a gun. If I try hard, I'm sure I can be useful to them. My heart is full of hatred for the enemy and I came to the liberated zone in order to avenge Troi and myself."

*She took a brand-new suit of black clothes out of her pack and told me with a smile:*

"The people here have given me many presents. As soon as the weather turned chilly they brought me blankets and warm clothes. But to me the most precious gift, one that I have been feeling happy about all day, is this black suit. After my escape from Saigon, I travelled through the liberated areas for many days; I met many women guerrillas, cadres, soldiers . . . all of them dressed in black. The liaison agent, my guide, told me: 'This is the battle dress worn by both men and

women in the war zones.' I wanted a black suit like that and this morning when I was given one, I felt so happy! When the Congress is over, I'll wear it and go with the women guerrillas and the other young women delegates to attend the Congress of South Vietnamese Youth."

*That evening, until late into the night, Quyen told me the last part of her story about her husband.*

On October 8 all the Saigon newspapers announced that Troi was to be executed in the coming week. The terrible news was brought to me by a little newsboy, his face pale with emotion. It was front-paged in the paper *Hanh Dong* (Action) which carried the following lines in a box: "Public execution. The first man to face the firing squad will be the one who planted a mine under Cong Ly Bridge on Mr. McNamara's route last May." A few papers stated quite openly that in the face of a general outbreak of meetings, demonstrations, strikes, and so on, a number of people would be publicly executed by the U.S.-Khanh clique to check the growing movement of popular opposition.

I hurried to the shop to ask for leave, so that I could have time to look for some way to get Troi a reprieve. When they saw me, many women at the shop turned silently away, wiping their tears. My girl friends, real chatterboxes in normal circumstances, were silent with sorrow. As I stepped out of the factory office one of them followed me a few steps and whispered in my ear:

"The older people here are saying among themselves that this is only a threat, that the administration won't dare to carry it out. So, keep calm and get hold of yourself."

When I got to my parents' home, all out of breath, I found my father giving a customer a haircut. He finished quickly and took me to a lawyer. I remembered clearly what Troi had

said when I met him for the first time in the condemned block: "Don't get a lawyer, it's just a waste of money." But now I felt I couldn't heed his words. So long as there was the slightest hope of getting him reprieved, I would leave no stone unturned, begrudge no expense. As I glanced through the daily papers, my heart pounded with fear. If only I might be allowed to see him once again on October 15!

On Sunday afternoon, October 11, I came home from the lawyer's office after giving him his fee of 5,000 piastres. At the door, my little sister shouted: "Tu is not going to die!"

I was so angry I wouldn't look at her — this was no time for joking. As I stood there, thoroughly depressed, she handed me a newspaper.

"It's in the papers," she said. "Look, there's Brother Tu's picture."

I looked at the photo in the paper *Thien Chi* (Goodwill). It showed Troi standing beside a table on which were a mine and a coil of wire. The headline ran: "A Telephone Call: the Life of an American Colonel for That of the Viet Cong Nguyen Van Troi." The article read:

"Venezuelan guerrillas have captured an American colonel and propose to exchange his life for that of the Viet Cong Nguyen Van Troi. They declare that if Nguyen is executed, Colonel Smolen will be shot within the hour."

I stood dumbfounded, not daring to believe it. What an amazing thing! Could it be another hoax appearing in the press?

Then neighbours came in with other papers and congratulated me.

One said:

"My heart has ached for you ever since I heard your husband was sentenced to death. What a tragedy to be widowed at your age!"

Another said:

"I thought he'd die this time. How wonderful that people abroad will save him! He's such a gentle and quiet young man. Who'd have thought he'd do such a thing?"

I read all the papers and saw that they said about the same thing, only the headlines were slightly different. One ran: "A Phone Call from the Communists."

I went back to my own home at Phu Nhuan to get more information. On my way there, I heard a familiar voice calling my name. A man I knew was standing in a doorway, beckoning to me. "Come inside," he said. "It's urgent."

As soon as I was in the room he showed me two papers and said:

"You're lucky, my child. Even though Troi's bomb didn't explode, the Americans were going to kill him for making an attempt on the life of such a big shot as their Defence Secretary. Now, at the very last minute, the tables have been turned on them."

His daughter came in from the next room and hugged me, saying excitedly.

"Oh, Sister Quyen! All of us at school are so happy. At noon today we had a meeting and talked about Troi. He's becoming known all over the world, isn't he? Even in far-away South America the people know that he was arrested and are trying to save him. One of my school-mates said: 'Troi's wife must be the happiest woman in Saigon today.'"

I was at a loss for words, because I didn't know if the news was true or not, so I only smiled. Her father said:

"So, I guessed right. Troi often visited us and from the way he talked I had an idea of the kind of man he was. He wasn't like the other young men around here. He never had a good word for the Americans, but he told us wonderful things about the North."

When I got home, many neighbours were waiting for me. As soon as they saw me they started teasing: "Get ready to welcome your husband home. Well, now you'll be shedding a few tears of joy!"

The Phu Nhuan people are very poor; all of them are pedlers and hardly any of them ever read books or newspapers. None of them knew where Venezuela was; they wondered how the Venezuelan people could have known about Troi's coming execution so quickly, and more amazing still, how they could have captured a high-ranking American officer to exchange for Troi. They asked me about that country but I knew no more than they. I couldn't tell them whether Venezuela was a big country or a small one, rich or poor. I was sure of only one thing: anti-American guerrillas were certainly active just as they were here in South Vietnam, and that was why the people were sympathetic towards Troi.

More people kept coming in, bringing every kind of paper. The Saigon press must have had record sales that day. Uncle A., who never followed the news in print, brought along a copy of *Song Moi* (New Life), saying:

"As I was selling rush mats in the market, I heard rumours that the man who tried to blow up Cong Ly Bridge had been saved from death. Newsboys were shouting at the top of their lungs: 'Extra! Latest news! A phone call saves a life!' I heard Troi's name and bought a paper. I can't read, but I see it's his photo."

Many people dropped in on their way home from work. Some, who were in a hurry, just left papers with the article on Troi marked in red pencil. After that long period of gloom, my home was again filled with talk and laughter. Everyone thought I must know why the Venezuelans felt such strong affection for my husband.

That evening I went to see Uncle Z. I thought he could explain to me about this exchange of lives. Uncle Z. knew Troi well; he had come to our wedding. He had been in jail for some years during the Diem administration. After his release, he made his living by doing some book-keeping at home. This is what he told me:

"The Americans are meeting opposition everywhere in the world today. Your husband used to talk about this when he visited me. Didn't he tell you anything about it?"

"Well, he did tell me they were being opposed in Saigon, but I don't know much about other places."

"The same thing is happening in Venezuela. It's closer to the United States, and so American oppression is all the heavier. It has lots of oil, but the oil is stolen by the Yankees. That is why the Venezuelans oppose them. Venezuela has guerrillas and an anti-U.S. national liberation front, just like in South Vietnam. If your husband had eliminated McNamara, all Venezuela would have rejoiced, because the enemy that invades their country and massacres and arrests their people is the same as in South Vietnam. And so your husband's arrest touched them deeply. There are thousands of prisons in Venezuela and many Venezuelans have been condemned to death, yet Venezuelan guerrillas thought first of your husband, of South Vietnam. . . ."

He pointed out Venezuela on the map.

"The people of Saigon have suddenly become interested in this country. Even my wife's been asking me why there's such solidarity between Venezuela and our country."

When I was in jail, Sister X. had often talked to us about the political situation when the guards weren't around. She told us of the support of the people all over the world for the South Vietnamese people's anti-American struggle. At that time, I couldn't imagine what that support meant. The news

now coming from Venezuela and shaking Saigon opened my eyes: our far-away friends not only knew that our people were fighting the Americans but were following the situation so closely that they even knew the name of a South Vietnamese about to be killed by the Yankees. This international support was rallying round my husband's case. His fight was the concern not only of Saigon, of South Vietnam, but of the whole world.

As I walked in the streets, I felt happy and proud when I overheard people commenting on this exchange of lives and how close were the struggles of a country in far-away Latin America and our own. It was clear that the joy wasn't mine alone. Everybody was talking about Troi's fate, and everybody was pleased that he had this chance of escaping death. Although I was being closely watched by the police, people kept coming to congratulate me on the good news. All Saigon was buzzing. Newsboys ran about the streets, shouting the good news as though they wanted to bring it to every home: "The man who tried to kill McNamara is saved! The man who made the attempt on McNamara's life is saved!" One of them folded a newspaper into a hat and stuck it on his head. It had a photo of Troi in front, one showing him facing the tribunal and smiling confidently. The boy elbowed his way through the Sunday crowds walking along Tran Hung Dao Avenue and held up a copy of *Thien Chi* (Goodwill) with an enormous frontpage headline that could be read twenty yards away: "Nguyen Van Troi's Execution Postponed!" While making change for his customers, the newsboy kept shouting: "Viet Cong Nguyen Van Troi saved by a phone call from the Communists."

I thought of V., the sister of a friend of mine. She was a school-girl who sold newspapers after class. Two days ago she had come weeping to my place to tell me Troi was to be executed. I wondered where she was now. Perhaps she was

selling newspapers in some quarter of the city, shouting herself hoarse with the good news about Troi.

In every department of the Bach Tuyet cotton wool factory where I worked – in the washing, drying, cutting, and packing departments, and in the office – people would joke: "Your husband's release will give McNamara a fright," or "All Saigon is talking about your husband. Quite an honour, don't you think?"

Some young men were talking animatedly about what they expected to happen very soon.

"The exchange of that American colonel for Quyen's husband surely won't be carried out in Saigon – the National Front for Liberation won't agree to that. On the other hand, it can't be carried out in the liberated area either. It will have to take place in some neutral country."

"After the exchange, Troi is bound to leave for the North – taking his wife along, of course."

"Will she be able to go?"

"Why not? The N.F.L. will send someone to fetch her."

"Of course, a wife has the right to be with her husband. They'll probably go together."

"Say, Sister Quyen, would you dare to?"

I was overjoyed to hear this, but I tried to restrain myself.

"Why go into such details?" I replied. "We still don't know for sure what's going to happen."

"But it's as clear as day. The papers say the American colonel will be shot immediately if Troi is executed."

At the noon break, a woman said to no one in particular:

"What a pity! Our factory's going to lose Little Quyen before long. She'll be going away with her husband to wherever that exchange takes place."

A friend of mine added with a touch of envy:

"You lucky girl, you'll soon be able to leave for the North."

Everybody pictured such a bright future! Only the day before, at that very hour, I had been sitting in the lawyer's office trying to arrange for a reprieve for my husband. Now my mind was filled with a rosy dream, beyond anything I could have imagined: not only would Troi's life be saved, not only would he be free, but he would be able to visit the North. He would meet Uncle Ho, and his dearest wish would be fulfilled. When talking to me about Ho Chi Minh, he used to say: "If we manage to go to the North we could wait outside his home to catch a glimpse of him."

And then he would say, a bit enviously:

"Our compatriots in the North can see him often, but we can't, even once."

How happy he must be if he had heard of the exchange, and moreover, of his soon being able to leave for the North!

I had just received a letter from Troi. My heart started beating wildly: perhaps he already knew the good news? The letter, a rather short one, had been sent by post. It read:

Chi Hoa, 11th October, 1964

*Quyen dear,*

*I hope you're in good health. I have a headache that keeps me from sleeping. My health is rather poor. I would like to have a tin of mentholated ointment. Will you bring one on your next visit?*

*Don't worry about me. Give my regards to our relatives and friends. Visit them and forget your worries.*

*Do you remember what I told you?*

*Your Troi*

Enclosed was another letter.

*Dear Loi,*

*I heard you've come to live with Quyen. Whenever she can't keep from crying, try to distract her. Think of something funny to say to cheer her up. Many thanks.*

*Troi*

On another sheet of paper he had written short messages to my parents, his nephew Hua, Brother Bay who shared the house with us, and a few neighbours, sending them his regards and appealing to them to look after me.

Apparently he knew nothing of the Venezuelan affair, but thought that he was to be executed the following week. However, in his letters he took care not to mention this. This only increased my anxiety, since I had been given even more reasons for hope. The American embassy, which had ordered Khanh to have my husband executed, had now ordered that the execution be postponed. The Saigon press was devoting even more space than before to news about Troi. His name was frontpaged in type often larger than the name of the paper itself. From some news-stalls loud-speakers were blaring: "Exchange of lives unprecedented in history! The American embassy has intervened with the authorities. . . ."

I wrote a letter to take to my husband the following day – visiting day – together with a package of food and medicines, to tell him the good news. I aired his new suit and brushed it. To please his dear ones he had borrowed money and, for the first time in his life, bought himself a western-style suit, a grey one. He had worn it only a few hours, on our wedding day. He would certainly wear it again on the day he was released from jail!

On the morning of October 15, I went to Chi Hoa jail. An enormous banner was stretched across the gate, bearing the

inscription: "The whole re-education centre greets the National High Council." Something unusual was happening: gendarmes lined the pathway leading to the condemned block. My guess was that they were a guard of honour for visiting National High Council members. I walked silently between the two rows of gendarmes towards the office.

No woman visiting a husband condemned to die could feel more calm, more hopeful than I did that day. If I were allowed to see him, what good news I had for him! I'd recite whole newspaper articles about him — I knew them by heart! I'd tell him how happy the city people were over the news!

I waited and waited. After more than an hour a policeman came up to me and said:

"There are guests today. A special occasion. Visits to prisoners have been cancelled, and no packages are allowed in. Come back another time."

I asked to have my package taken to my husband, but he refused, saying that I should come back in the afternoon. It was then ten in the morning. I returned to the gate, walking between two rows of gendarmes standing rigid as statues at intervals of about a metre. Outside the compound of the condemned block I met a large number of journalists, both Vietnamese and foreign. They seemed in a hurry, and had cameras slung over their shoulders.

At the gate I had to step aside for a military van driving in. It was carrying a coffin. "Another prisoner has died," I thought. Along Hoa Hung Street outside the prison enclosure, gendarmes were now standing guard in groups. As I waited at the bicycle-parking lot for my bike to be brought out, somebody said:

"That's the wife of the man who planted the mine under the Cong Ly Bridge. It's her, all right. Why has she come back?"

The people around there knew me well. Over the months that I'd been coming to visit my husband, I'd often waited in front of the prison or bought food and other things at their shops. They sympathised with me and loved Troi. They always gave me the freshest fruit and cakes. Some would say: "We shouldn't think of making a profit off people like you. We're selling to you at cost."

As I turned, an elderly woman beckoned to me, sorrow written on her face.

"Why did you come back? They are about to execute your husband. Why don't you demand that they let you in?"

I couldn't believe my ears. No, it wasn't possible!

"It can't be true," I said. "I've just come from there. They told me I could bring food to him this afternoon. Besides, the execution's been postponed. It's in the papers."

"We all know it's in the papers. Up till this morning we shared your joy. In all these years we've been selling things in front of the prison, it's the first time such an exchange of lives was going to take place. But they've gone back on their word. Even though the American has been released in that far-away place, your husband's going to be executed. The gendarmes said that the man who planted a mine under the Cong Ly Bridge was to be shot."

As I stood there bewildered and disbelieving, the woman took me into her house and told me in a voice choked with sobs:

"They haven't lied. They're going to execute your husband this morning. He'll be shot. The coffin has been brought in, the journalists and cameramen have come. Rush back, child. A gendarme I know told me everything."

So it was true. Crying and sobbing, I ran to the prison gate. The iron doors had been shut fast. Some gendarmes tried to pull me away, but I struggled, screaming:

"You can't kill my husband! You can't kill him! You haven't the right! You've got to let me see him!" But a gendarme pinioned my arms and said:

"No one is allowed in. You'll have to apply for a pass."

Then they dragged me away and another group of gendarmes came up to block the way to the prison gate. Turning towards the condemned block, I screamed my husband's name at the top of my voice. I was beside myself at the thought that at this very moment they might be taking him to the execution ground. The gendarmes pushed me away from the gate. Finally I ran to the bicycle lot, fetched my bike and rushed home to talk with my father about what I could do. Some people stopped me, asking:

"Why have you come back? Did they refuse to let you in?"

"They stopped me. I pleaded with them but it was no use. They've blocked the gate. I'm going home to find my father."

Furious, the people cursed the administration aloud:

"Barbarians! To stop a wife from seeing her husband before they kill him! Barbarians!"

Troi's father had come from Quang Nam. He had heard about the exchange of lives, and was waiting hopefully for the final outcome. The news I brought home came like a bolt from the blue to both him and my own father. The three of us went to see our lawyer again. He couldn't believe it.

"Impossible," he said. "There's been an order postponing the execution. If there were a change, they would let me know — I'm his defence counsel. It must be somebody else who's being executed."

"The people who live around the prison say that it's the man who wanted to blow up the Cong Ly Bridge," I said. "Please investigate and put our minds at ease."

The lawyer hesitated. He clearly didn't believe what I had said. At last he rang up the office of the jail. The expression

on his face changed suddenly. "Is that so? Is that so?" he muttered, bewildered. He put down the receiver.

"He's just been executed. At eleven o'clock. All we can do now is ask for his body."

My legs gave way and I sank onto a chair. Slumping forward on the lawyer's desk, I could not even cry.

"Now we must try to get his body back," said my father, sobbing. "We can't rely on others for this."

I took a taxi all over town, to all the police stations and courts, trying to find where my husband's body was. But they turned a deaf ear to me, or would put me on the wrong track. I went from one cemetery to another. At one stop the taxi driver asked me in surprise:

"Why are you rushing about like this from one graveyard to another?"

"They killed my husband, but I don't know where they've buried him."

"Why did they kill your husband?"

As I remained silent, he repeated his question.

"He planted a mine under the Cong Ly Bridge."

"What!"

He said it so loudly that even people on the street turned to look. Then he asked:

"His name is Troi, isn't it? Nguyen Van Troi?"

I could not answer. My eyes stung with tears and I had to bite my lip to keep from crying. The driver kept repeating my husband's name as though they were old friends. His face had become red. After a while, he decided to ask once again to make sure.

"Isn't your husband Nguyen Van Troi, the man who had the courage to try to kill American Defence Secretary McNamara?"

I nodded.

He reached behind him for a newspaper and thrust it into my hand.

"The papers said the execution had been postponed. But they killed him."

I couldn't bear to look at the paper, the mere sight of it tore my heart.

"Take me to another cemetery, please, if there is any other."

The driver slammed the door shut and drove off at high speed. I have no idea how many miles we covered that afternoon. My head was spinning.

At the cab-stand at Ben Thank market-place, the driver stopped and called some of his friends over.

"Nguyen Van Troi was killed this morning," he told them.

They didn't believe him.

"But it's impossible. The American embassy ordered the administration to postpone the execution."

The driver pointed to me.

"She's Troi's wife and she's looking for his body."

They all turned to me and asked:

"Is it true that they killed him this morning?"

"Yes."

They were dumbfounded. The taxi sped on towards Gia Dinh, but by the end of the afternoon we still hadn't found where they had buried Troi. Finally we drove to my place. Stopping his car at the crossroads leading to our quarter, the driver sat slumped in his seat, looking worn and frustrated. Sweat was pouring down his face and his grey shirt was wet. At last he got out of the car.

"I'll go and look around some more this evening. If I find out anything I'll come and let you know."

I gave him his fare. He counted it and gave half back.

"I'll only take enough to feed my wife and kids today. You take this for tomorrow's fare, in case you have to go on with the searching."

But the following morning I learned from the papers that the administration had buried my husband at the municipal cemetery. The whole family went there, bringing a small grave marker with his name on it, which we set up before his grave. The police were waiting for us at the cemetery, watching our every move and taking photographs of each of us.

My mother was the last in the family to learn the news. She had been away peddling things in Binh Long, Bien Hoa. When she returned she bought meat and fruit in preparation for her next visit to the jail. At the door, my little sister Can greeted her with the dreadful news.

"Mummy," she said, "they've shot Brother Tu."

My mother was half-crazed with sorrow. She collapsed on the ground, shouting, crying, and cursing the American aggressors and the Khanh clique. Neighbours came rushing in. Police spies who had been keeping a close watch on our family appeared at the door. My father was worried and tried to reason with my mother.

"Don't make so much noise. I know what you're suffering, but try to be quieter."

But my mother wouldn't listen to him. "You have your own way of mourning him," she said, "I have mine. I must cry out my sorrow. I curse the barbarians who killed him. Let them come and kill me! I'm not afraid. What a wonderful son-in-law! Where in this world is his equal?"

She was beside herself with grief and hatred.

From Khanh Hoi, she rushed to my home at Phu Nhuan.

At the sight of Troi's photograph, she burst into tears again. In the part of the house where Bay lived the three striped

flag of the puppet administration was hanging. My mother pulled it down, tore it to pieces and trampled on it.

In accordance with the customs of the North, my mother arranged for a seven-week memorial service to be held at Khanh Hoi pagoda for my husband.

At the beginning of the first week, the monks put this notice on a blackboard outside the door of the pagoda:

> *On October 22, 1964, at 7 in the evening, a memorial service will be held at the pagoda for the peace of the soul of Nguyen Van Troi. All believers in Buddha attend.*

Security agents kept watch at the gate long before the ceremony. I was afraid nobody would dare to come. But there were more people than for many a service I have seen, bringing incense and flowers. The ceremony at the pagoda was a great consolation to me. Since the day of Troi's death, the people of Saigon had distributed many leaflets condemning his murderers, the Khanh clique, and praising his courage. A lorry driver who brought cotton to the factory where I worked told me that right across the Bien Hoa highway, along which there was heavy traffic day and night, a banner had been strung with the inscription: "Long live the spirit of Nguyen Van Troi!" Many taverns and restaurants kept the newspapers of October 16, 1964, which carried photographs of the execution so that their customers could look at them whenever they wished. On the morning of October 16, there was such a mournful atmosphere at Ben Than market that business came to a standstill. Mrs. M. my foster-mother later told me that the police superintendent at the market had exclaimed, "Why is everyone so sad about that Viet Cong?"

That evening despite the presence of the police, people flocked to the pagoda. Seeing me in mourning, they approached me and asked how long we had been married, what

kind of job I had, what was Troi's native village. An elderly woman inquired: "What kind of people were the parents of this courageous son?" Then she told me with anguish in her voice: "Your husband laid down his life for the country. His sacrifice has brought you great sorrow. If the police weren't always watching you, I'd ask you to come home with me. I do hope you understand."

"It's very kind of you to come to the memorial service," I told her. "I was afraid nobody would dare to because of the police."

"Well, some people were afraid. They are praying for your husband at home. But my friends and I said to ourselves: 'He showed such courage on the execution ground. Why should we be afraid just to go to a memorial service?' "

Sister K. also came to the ceremony. Only a few days before she had told me cheerfully: "Don't forget to invite me to the banquet celebrating Troi's release."

Now she said:

"I didn't learn about the service till after dinner, so I didn't have time to get incense and flowers." Then she asked: "Have you listened to Radio Liberation and Radio Hanoi?"

"I haven't a radio. And even if I had, I couldn't have listened to those stations because of the police."

"They announced that the title 'Hero of South Vietnam' and the Bronze Citadel of the Fatherland medal had been conferred on Troi. In all these twenty years of resistance no one in the South has received such an honour. This should be a great comfort to you."

"I've seen a pamphlet distributed to the city people, telling about Troi's life, what he has done, and the honours you've just mentioned."

In a corner of the pagoda grounds a great crowd had gathered around me. I told them how the administration had for-

bidden me to see my husband for one last time before they executed him and how they had even refused to turn his body over to me. The details of the execution had been published in the newspapers, but only now were they hearing what barbarous treatment my husband and his family had received. All around me I heard exclamations of shock. Many people walked towards the gate, sobbing.

During the fourth week I left for Troi's native place in Quang Nam. It was my first visit to my husband's village. Before leaving, I asked the people to see to the following week's service in case I could not return in time.

"Stay as long as you wish," they said. "Troi gave his life for our sake, for his compatriots, so it is our duty to look after him. The memorial service is the concern of us all. There is just one thing we'd like you to do: When you return, bring a photograph of him to the pagoda, and on the first and the fifteenth of each month we'll come and bring flowers and burn incense."

I returned to Saigon in time for the last week of the memorial services. More people than ever attended. They asked me about my visit to Troi's village and I told them briefly how the Liberation cadres had come to see me and what they had told me: that they had killed many enemies to avenge Troi, that they had pledged to learn from his courage. They had also composed songs in praise of Troi and had urged us members of his family to take part in the revolution and be worthy of him, a national hero who had received the highest award of the National Front for Liberation.

As I left the pagoda late one night a little girl passed me a message from Sister X. This made me happy. So she had remained in Saigon ever since her escape from prison. I had been longing to get in touch with her to ask her help.

As soon as I got home, I carefully closed the door, lighted the lamp and started reading her message:

*"I have not been able to come and share your sorrow. But I know that your heart is full not only of grief but of pride in your husband. It is like that for us all: We feel so proud of our comrade whose sacrifice has won the respect of the whole country, of the whole world.*

*"Last night, we listened to Radio Hanoi's broadcast of a poetry recital. To Huu, who wrote 'We March Forward', recited a poem he had written about your husband. We were not able to record it but I am sure we will have the full text of it soon, for I know a group of students who collect all the poems of To Huu.*

*"Writers and poets have been praising Troi in the highest terms: 'A great young man, the shining star of the Ho Chi Minh era.' He faced death with such a spirit that students I know have been saying to each other: 'If we must die, let us die like Troi.' They have pasted photographs of him in their notebooks. One group has collected nearly a hundred photos of him in a sequence that show him from the moment he stepped out of the condemned ward to when he was shouting his last words.*

*"His life, that of an ordinary electrician, has become a shining example for workers and students. A number of them have organized secret meetings at which films taken by journalists of Troi's last moments were shown. Many groups have succeeded in putting up memorials in his honour right in the centre of the city. I wonder if you have heard this.*

*"One was at the end of Takao Bridge, outside the gate of the Republican football field, and another was inside Chi Hoa jail itself, which is really amazing. When you visited*

*Troi in the condemned block, you saw for yourself how heavily guarded Chi Hoa is. And yet, a group of young men slipped into the compound and erected a memorial on the very spot where the enemy had tied him to a stake and shot him. They even took a photograph of the memorial before withdrawing. Many people who heard this story couldn't believe their ears: how could a memorial in honour of a revolutionary fighter have been erected on the very execution ground of Chi Hoa? But no one doubted any longer when the police themselves admitted it.*

*"The enemy thought that by killing Troi they could hold up our revolutionary movement, but things have proved just the opposite. Everything is going much better than before. Every member of our group has volunteered to kill American aggressors to avenge Troi. Our recent drive to recruit new members which we called 'Commemorate Nguyen Van Troi' has had wonderful results. All his actions, his words, and the story of his life as you told it to me in jail have served as topics for discussions and study in my own group.*

*"When I heard about the memorial services being held in Troi's honour, I asked this little girl to take some incense and flowers to the pagoda and to give you this message. I would like to tell you once again: Try to live in such a way as to be worthy of your husband. As for me, I'll give you all the help I can. I'll write you again. In my next letter I'll tell you something you will be happy to hear."*

On the 25th day of the 12th lunar month I again visited my husband's grave. It was my eighth or ninth visit. As always, two police spies followed on my heels but I paid no attention to them. After laying a bouquet of flowers on the grave and burning incense, I lingered for a long time. The

two spies got tired of waiting and sat down on a nearby grave to continue their watch.

But how could they know what was in my mind at that moment? The following day I would be leaving Saigon and my husband's last resting place. Closely watched by the police as I was, it was very difficult for me to take part in revolutionary activities inside the city. My decision had been made: on the following day I would find my way to the liberated zone. I would accept any assignment that allowed me to avenge my husband. I made a silent vow to do all he had told me in the last minutes of my third visit to him in the condemned block.

"If we should be separated for long, no matter what the circumstances, don't let the enemy intimidate you. Make every effort to join in the revolution and follow the instructions and guidance of the comrades who were your fellow-prisoners."

Yes, said I to myself, the way you have lived, Troi, I promise you to follow to the end.